

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound

BELLE

AMMA ASANTE ON RACE AND THE COSTUME DRAMA

PLUS

- CANNES 2014: MIKE LEIGH, CRONENBERG, THE DARDENNES, NURI BILGE CEYLAN AND MORE
- JULIETTE BINOCHÉ IN BRUNO DUMONT'S 'CAMILLE CLAUDEL 1915' ● DENNIS POTTER

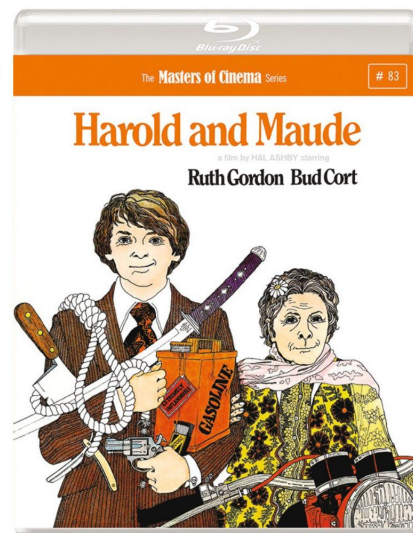
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Tales of ordinary madness

Bruno Dumont's austere evocation of the life of a troubled artist in a French asylum, *Camille Claudel 1915*, is driven by a complex performance by Juliette Binoche. By **Jonathan Romney**

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Portrait of a lady

Amma Asante's *Belle* presents a fictionalised account of the true tale of a mixed-race aristocrat in 18th-century England, a delicate portrait of the complexities of race and racism that strives to show that nothing in life is ever simply black and white. By **Ashley Clark**

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Angels and devils: the dark dreams of Dennis Potter

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Love among the ruins




















Director Fei Mu emerged with China's Second Generation in the 1930s but rejected their leftist political agendas. His cinematic voice found full flower in 1948's *Spring in a Small Town*, the tale of a love triangle set amid the post-war devastation of the Yangtze Delta. By **Noah Cowan**



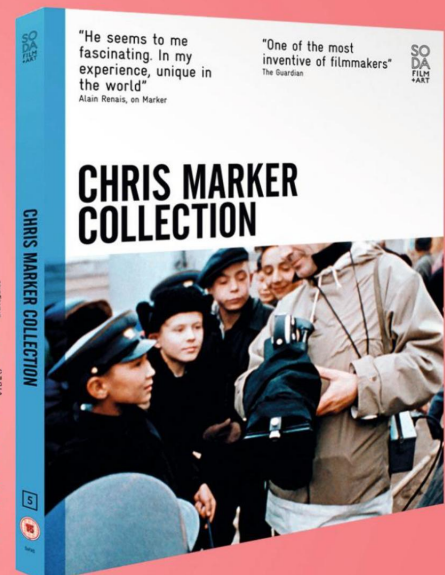
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“A FILM OF
IMMENSE VISUAL BEAUTY”



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COVER

Gugu Mbatha-Raw in *Belle*.
Retouched by DawkinsColour

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And online this month Iranian cinephilia | Mickey Rooney and *The Black Stallion* | burying the 'hybrid' documentary | Sheffield Doc/Fest and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

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**walerian
borowczyk**
collection

the beast
immoral tales
blanche
goto, isle of love
theatre of mr and mrs kabal
the short films

“[Borowczyk's films]
activate a part of my brain
that very few other things do...”
Terry Gilliam

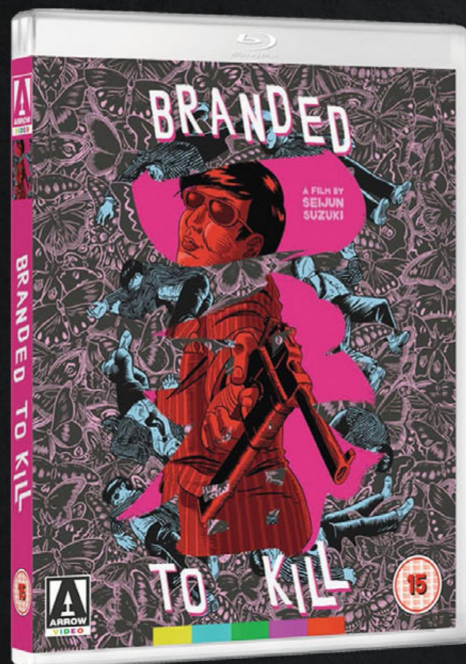
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Editorial Nick James



SMALL WONDERS

Thinking in retrospect about Cannes this year – my 17th – I realise my approach to the festival has evolved in a way that makes me even less effective as a Friday night film tipster (if I ever was one). Every year in that dizzying place a collector's mentality prevails among the many critics and programmers hunting down 'masterpieces' of film art. They may believe they've found it with Nuri Bilge Ceylan's fine Palme d'Or winner *Winter Sleep* and they may be right. You might assume that's what *S&S* is all about too – after all, we publish the ten-yearly poll of best films that's widely recognised for its role in defining the canon. But for me this quest is reductive and unhelpful, especially since in Cannes everyone is watching films for the first time and – with another screening always imminent, and blogposts and tweets to write – you have little chance to reflect on a film's deeper qualities (and, in any case, as regular readers know, we view the 'm' word with suspicion in these pages).

What struck me most about the films this year in Cannes is that, while so many were full of arresting performances and startling moments, few felt integrated and complete in themselves. I can't tell if that's a change in how I view films, or if there's an increasing uncertainty among filmmakers about how to declare a film finished. Given the regular rows about who controls final cut and the facility with which many versions can be created, such an uncertainty would be no surprise. After all, the conventional wisdom has it that a film is never finished, it's just terminated by agreement. On the other hand, I seem to be increasingly picky, finding moments in films that for me don't come off, while at the same time I prefer films that take aesthetic and thematic risks to those that don't. Two films from Cannes that fall into that gap of concern are Alice Rohrwacher's Grand Prix winner *The Wonders*, which I'd say is mostly brilliant but just a little clumsy, while Olivier Assayas's *Clouds of Sils Maria* is brimming with risky business but often seems out of control. Of course my yen to feel this play-off between ambition and achievement may just be a personal thing, in which case I suppose I'm stuck with it.

By coincidence, this line of questioning films has taken me to the dilemma Mark Cousins deals with in his column this month – that we remember fragments of great films more than whole narratives (see page 13). Dozens of indelible scenes filled up my

Dozens of indelible scenes filled up my memory in Cannes, but I'd struggle to recall more than a couple of films in detail all the way through. Could my attention span be reducing?



memory in Cannes, but I'd struggle to recall more than a couple of films in detail all the way through. Is this a symptom of electronic device usage? Could my attention span be reducing like, purportedly, those of the younger generations are said to be? Am I losing interest in capturing the detailed structures of two-hour films? I'd rather believe in another explanation – that I've gone back to the roots of my own cinephilia.

At an all-night *film noir* screening at London's Scala cinema in the 1980s, after three of the five films had played – *The Maltese Falcon*, *Murder My Sweet* and *Out of the Past* – I began to give in to sleep, so that fragments of *Where Danger Lives* and *The Big Steal* merged during my brief naps, particularly with *Out of the Past* because all three films starred Robert Mitchum. Together they became the most amazing oneiric epic in my mind, the pleasure of which has stayed with me ever since. I felt a similar buzz in Cannes at the moment when a full Palais burst into spontaneous applause during Jean-Luc Godard's typically uncompromising and playful 3D work *Goodbye to Language* (see page 28). Who could have predicted such a seemingly austere figure causing such an outpouring of joy?

Godard, of course, at least since his motorcycle accident in 1971, has consistently been a collagist and punster, a collector of scraps of scenes, a fragmentist *par excellence*. His assault on the senses felt fresher than most of the films produced by those much younger than him. Adopting his confident 'waltzing' approach in my head, the courtroom scenes from *Timbuktu*, *Leviathan* and *The Blue Room* jumbled themselves into a hilarious and terrifying work of its own. The astonishing duet of the mute boy whistling and the beekeeper's daughter doing tricks with bees on her face in *The Wonders* ran on a loop. Once one of the hidden pleasures of a film festival, this kind of thing is what happy souls with editing software get up to everywhere. It is, of course, a form of self-indulgence, but then decadent pleasures, too, are an important element of Cannes. **S**

IN THE FRAME

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY



Street scene: Hopper's images form a sprawling social history of the era

Dennis Hopper's 'lost' photos from the early 60s present an oblique autobiography of a man in flux documenting a nation in transition

By Charlie Fox

In the crazed period between his youth playing vaguely psychotic teenage heartthrobs and his eventual fame from *Easy Rider* (1969), Dennis Hopper took hundreds of photographs. He was exiled from Hollywood for battling with director Henry Hathaway throughout the filming of *From Hell to Texas* (1958) and largely kept out of film work for half a decade. Any account of the subsequent interlude quickly assumes the rhythm of some delirious fiction. Adrift in New York, he hung out with Miles Davis, got transformed by the fury of abstract expressionism, and studied method acting with Lee Strasberg. He returned to Los Angeles, acquired a camera, threw glittering parties and started wandering again.

Happily, the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition 'Dennis Hopper: The Lost Album', curated by Petra Giloy-Hirtz, illuminates this mysterious lacuna in his intemperate life, collecting more than 400 of Hopper's photographs taken between 1961-67. The accompanying catalogue, from Prestel, is a treasure: smartly written, carefully researched and containing plenty of testimony from Hopper. (Others tell the intricate tale behind its title, explaining why the collection hasn't seen the light since 1970 – it involves carelessness, guns and snowdrifts of cocaine.) The contents form a sprawling social history and – though the man himself is nowhere to be seen until his bearded appearance in a ghoulish postscript – become a cool, oblique autobiography, flashing past in moody black and white.

There's a seductive urge to think of every picture as a still from some huge road movie and imagine Hopper in full demonic swagger throughout, running around Mexican graveyards – stark, sinister shots – up to mischief with starlets straight out of William Klein's fashion-world satire *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?* (1966), going to bullfights, and befriending street kids outside a derelict funhouse in Harlem.

Edinburgh Film Festival

Highlights this year (18-29 June) include spotlights on Iranian and German cinema as well as UK premieres of Bong Joon-ho's 'Snowpiercer' (right) – the director's, not Harvey Weinstein's cut – and a Tsai Ming-liang double bill of 'Stray Dogs' and 'Journey to the West'.



Digital Revolution

As 35mm disappears from theatres, London's Barbican Gallery celebrates the possibilities of pixels in an immersive exhibition that includes new commissions from filmmakers and game designers as well as an exploration of the visual effects work of studios like Double Negative, which collaborated with Christopher Nolan on 'Inception' (right).



ON OUR
RADAR



I have a dream: Martin Luther King is one of a series of key 60s figures to appear in Hopper's photos


Frame by frame, it all becomes profoundly epochal; there's a hallucinatory historical sweep underneath these pictures that catches America in the act of transformation. Kennedy's funeral is glimpsed through the toxic grunge of an old TV screen, as is the surface of the moon. James Brown is seen surrounded by teenage girls – everyone's grinning but he's looking past the camera. You find the rich texture of a life lived with furious energy. Hopper ran off into the night to watch a riot on Sunset Boulevard and returned in possession of a photo-essay, which ends on a biker hitting us with a desperate stare.

Photography obviously wasn't just a carefree experiment for him – technique was crucial. "I like to keep it very formal and very straight," he said. These images are nothing like snapshots: he makes graceful compositions out of quicksilver scenes, plays with light and cannily arranges shadows. He belongs in the scuzzy, occult tradition of American street photography after Walker Evans and Robert Frank, the art that prizes the weirdly symbolic wreckage of American life: expressionist grime, drifting smoke and sudden, haunted looks. He charmed his way in to private circles: a handful of warm-hearted shots of Hells Angels cavorting in a park tumble past – was he unconsciously researching *Easy Rider*? In the chronicle of a civil rights march through

Alabama – photographs that are by turns deeply painful and full of wild hope – Hopper seems eerily to shoot the same wilderness found in Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* 25 years before. Those weathered inhabitants of the Deep South in the Great Depression are still here, waiting outside crooked houses at dusk.

Hollywood glamour appears subtly in another form. Hopper manoeuvred into the California art world and remained a renowned collector for the rest of his life. A bunch of playful, elegant images capture the makers of Pop Art on the first wave of success, including a shot of ludic painter-photographer Ed Ruscha waiting outside a TV store.

But hidden within this abundance of images there's a lingering sense of sadness – in the knowledge that Hopper was in exile throughout and in our awareness of the psychosis that awaits him at the end of the book when success finally arrives.

Photography was, he said, a method for "filling the void I was feeling", a way of numbing his longing to make films when that wasn't possible. The return of these photographs feels like the last of his devilish late triumphs. This is somewhere to get lost for a long time. 

 **'Dennis Hopper: The Lost Album' is at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, from 26 June–19 October**

The Werner Herzog collection

Eighteen features and documentaries by the German director (right) are available in full HD for the first time on this eight-disc Blu-ray box-set, out in July from the BFI. Extras include Les Blank's Herzog documentaries and Jack Bond's long-unseen 1982 'South Bank Show' on the filmmaker.



Sheffield Doc/Fest


Britain's largest documentary showcase (7-12 June) previews Scorsese's 'A 50 Year Argument', about the 'New York Review of Books' and Kim Longinotto's 'Love Is All' (right), an archive documentary exploring courtship in cinema. It also honours Agnès Varda with a retrospective.

FAMOUS FIVES

JANE CAMPION



The director of *Bright Star* and *The Piano* (which won the Palme d'Or in 1993) and the Competition jury head at this year's Cannes selects her five

favourite films that have won the top prize at the festival since its inception in 1939. 

Blow-Up (1966)

All the winners are films of their moment.

Taxi Driver (1976)

I feel there needs to be a renaissance of 70s movies.

Apocalypse Now (1979)

My all-time favourite movie. He doesn't know it, but Francis Ford Coppola is my teacher.

Pulp Fiction (1994)

An extraordinary film and a modern, exciting choice for the Palme d'Or.

The White Ribbon (2009)

Haneke is one of my favourite filmmakers.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

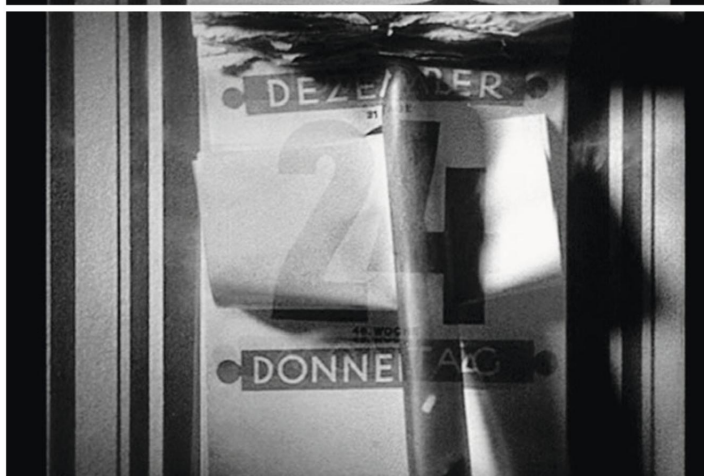
FRANK CAPRA

'There are no rules in filmmaking, only sins, and the cardinal sin is dullness'

Frank Capra



AS TIME GOES BY



Dates with destiny: Emil Jannings, a fool for love in *The Blue Angel*

Among the innumerable ways of marking the passage of time in a film, nothing has proved more enduring than the simple calendar



By Hannah McGill

The capacity of cinema to activate our deepest and most intense feelings – aesthetic rapture, childhood nostalgia, grief, desire –

hardly wants for documentation. But sometimes it's the precise evocation of an utterly quotidian feeling or experience that stirs, and that goes on to linger in the memory. I have a particular attachment to a little motif from *Billy Liar* (1963): the stack of calendars that Billy (Tom Courtenay) is supposed to have delivered for his boss, Mr Shadrack, but which lurk instead in Billy's wardrobe, the better to remind him of his own inefficiency and duplicitousness by cascading on to his head when he opens its doors. Perhaps if a ruthlessly organised individual watched *Billy Liar*, the protagonist's failure to 'JUST DELIVER THE CALENDARS ALREADY!' might strike them as inexplicable and irritating. But for those who have a little *Billy Liar* in them – a tendency to procrastinate, to self-sabotage, to pile trouble on trouble by not doing things that would

be perfectly easily done – the calendars are a poignant detail, as revealing of Billy's self-imposed limitations as his final choice of stasis over escape, challenge and romantic love. They stand for all the time he is wasting not capitalising on his talent as a writer, letting his libido guide him into insincere relationships with women who aren't complex enough to satisfy him. The passage of time is rendered still crueller by the time that it is: the dawn of the 60s, when youth and the creativity of the young was prized as never before, at least in Billy's faraway and fetishised London. Billy is not holding out for the right moment to go and make his name – he is in the very act of missing his moment, and his assault by the stack of calendars makes this a physical reality for him. Mr Shadrack is, of course, an undertaker; the



Billy Liar

calendar is, in effect, an advertisement for death.

Clarifying just how much time is passing in a film, without showing the protagonist waking up every day or resorting to the disruption of explanatory captions, requires a certain ingenuity. Leaves can bud and fall in time-lapse; newspapers can thud off printing presses or spin towards the camera. *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) emphasises the length of a particular decision-making process


Leaves can bud and fall in time-lapse; newspapers can thud off printing presses or spin towards the camera



The Hudsucker Proxy

by showing a peripheral character reading her way through *War and Peace*, and then moving on to *Anna Karenina*. Films that skip about in time, such as *L'Appartement* (1996), often resort to characters' altered hairdos to keep things clear for the audience. But the most time-honoured manner of depicting the passage of time without fully exiting the film's reality is by showing a calendar with its pages flipping by, fluttering away or being crossed off. The calendar-flip can also transport the audience backwards, as in *Written on the Wind* (1956), where it bridges the flash-forward opening and the main action; or propel it towards an anticipated event, like the rather obscurely characterised "end of the world" promised and averted in *Donnie Darko* (2001).

This trope is hard-wired enough that even by 1930, when Josef von Sternberg deployed it in *The Blue Angel*, it could be toyed with: helping his wife Lola (Marlene Dietrich) to curl her hair, Emil Jannings's obsessive, love-struck Professor Rath casts around for paper on which to cool the iron, and uses a page from the wall calendar, which then flips forward from 1925 to 1929. His emasculation is by now complete; implicitly trapped all that time in Lola's dressing room, he's now getting himself up in clown make-up to play in her cabaret troupe, while she is romanced by another man.

Pin-up girls, of whom Lola is an early cinematic example, have featured on calendars since the end of the 19th century, and cinema has displayed an interesting tendency to extend this connection between changing ideas of female beauty and the forward rush of time. In *The Time Machine* (1960), changing fashions on a shop-window mannequin mark where the hero is in history. *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) shows the length of a prison sentence through pin-up girl posters: Rita Hayworth is replaced by Marilyn Monroe – who had also achieved notoriety, of course, as a nude calendar girl – and then Raquel Welch. In *Calendar Girls* (2003) the erotic calendar associated with traditionally male spaces – men's prisons, garages – is lent a veneer of cosy respectability and virtue when middle-aged Women's Institute members pose nude for one in order to raise money to improve a hospital. Among the touring company for the stage show based on the film was Helen Fraser, who – flip the calendar back a few decades – appeared in *Billy Liar* as Barbara, the cloyingly conventional girlfriend Billy privately pictures in pin-up girl corsetry. 



Written on the Wind

THE FIVE KEY...

GORDON WILLIS FILMS

Through his collaborations with, especially, Coppola, Pakula and Allen, the great DP changed the way films look



By Michael Brooke

"I think Rembrandt went too far a couple of times," quipped Gordon Willis in the cinematography documentary *Visions of Light*, when

confronted with evidence that a particularly crepuscular shot in *The Godfather Part II* wasn't so much underlit as glaringly underexposed. But great cinematographers are also great risk-takers, and Willis, who earned the sobriquet 'the Prince of Darkness', regularly worked with directors who were happy to indulge him. He died on 18 May, aged 82.



2 The Godfather (1972)

Marlon Brando helped, and the overhead lighting was also expedient, bringing the make-up out to its best advantage. But it was Willis's sepia-toned cinematography that established in the audience's mind the notion of darkness as a metaphor for something lurking in Don Corleone's soul.



4 Pennies from Heaven (1981)

Willis often deserved the nickname 'the Prince of Darkness', but not here. Born in the Depression era to two Broadway dancers, he fully understood the milieu, and captured it brilliantly in *Pennies* by fusing gaudily colourful choreography with explicit Edward Hopper references.



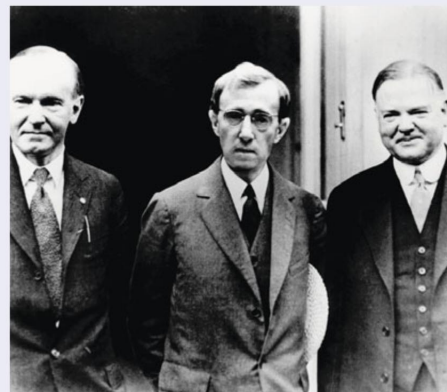
1 Klute (1971)

A year after his feature debut, Willis became a front-rank cinematographer with the first of six films for Alan J. Pakula. In the first instalment of Pakula's 'paranoia trilogy', Willis's vertiginously framed camerawork both ramped up the paranoia and gave an art-movie sheen to an ostensibly commercial thriller.



3 Manhattan (1979)

Seldom has a single shot – of Allen and Keaton silhouetted in front of the bridge – so encapsulated a film's entire essence. It not only became the poster image, but also prompted Allen to insist the film be framed correctly on video at a time when widescreen films were still routinely chopped in half.



5 Zelig (1983)

We take these things for granted in the CGI era, but Willis's mixing and matching of purpose-filmed and archive footage (sometimes in the same shot) to insert Allen's 'human chameleon' into history, was achieved the painstakingly old-fashioned photochemical way, and the film wouldn't have worked without it.

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

Ryan Coogler has been hailed as the new Spike Lee for *Fruitvale Station*, his tale of the final hours of a young black man killed by police

By Kaleem Aftab

Ryan Coogler's debut feature *Fruitvale Station* is a docudrama based on the events leading to the death of 22-year-old Oscar Grant III at the hands of police in the early hours of New Year's Day in 2009 at the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid Transit station in Oakland, California. The film debuted at Sundance in 2013 where it won both the Audience Award and the Grand Jury Prize in the US Dramatic section. The 27-year-old Coogler, a graduate of the University of Southern California, was hailed as his generation's Spike Lee for his successful weaving of real-life race issues into an engrossing drama. He was awarded the Un Certain Regard Avenir prize at Cannes.

Kaleem Aftab: When did you first realise racism existed?

Ryan Coogler: There wasn't like a single moment. When you're a kid you don't really notice ethnicity, you notice one person looks different to another, but nobody is telling you the historical implications of it. I don't think as a kid you recognise a racist encounter. Racism is something that has to be taught. The moment you have somebody explain the real deal to you, that is when you understand – and I had that conversation early.

KA: Who with?

RC: It was my great-aunt, my grandmother's little sister. She kind of explained the history to me. I think it came out of a conversation about African-American history. I was like, "Wait, you mean there was slavery here and we were brought here!"

KA: You were born in 1986, just as hip-hop was hitting the mainstream and Spike Lee had made his first film. You grew up in one of the first generations where black stars were established.

RC: That is true. But I guess it goes in ebbs and flows. I feel like in TV there is a change. In the 90s there was black people all over TV. You had *The Fresh Prince*, *The Cosby Show*, *Family Matters* – people from all different walks of life. In *The Fresh Prince*, for instance, you saw an African-American who was crazily financially successful and not from entertainment. He was a judge, something you never see. I don't think you can have a show like that now.

KA: Why not?

RC: I just don't. I don't know the explanation. I think it will be a big deal.

KA: Where did your filmmaking impetus come from?

RC: Before I knew I wanted to make movies I would watch a lot of TV and I read a lot. Although I was a jock growing up – I played a lot of American football, basketball and ran track, 400 metres. I was exposed to seeing movies at an early age. I remember going to the theatre to see *Malcolm X* and I was about five years old. I went to see *Boyz n the Hood* and I was literally like a baby crying when they shot Ricky.

KA: How did watching *Boyz n the Hood* influence you? Was it anything like your experience?



Ryan Coogler: 'When you're a kid you don't really notice ethnicity... Racism has to be taught'

RC: Hell, that was a lot like my experience. I just hadn't had it yet. I was four years old but it ended up being very similar to that. Growing up, you see your friends get killed, go to jail. I'm at that age right now, 27, where we are in uncharted territory, once you get past 25 where we are from, you realise that there is this whole other world.

KA: Did your personal experience play into *Fruitvale Station* in the way you interpreted Oscar going about his day on New Year's Eve?

RC: Just about all of it. Oscar and I didn't know each other, I never met him, but I found out after he died that there was one degree of separation between us. My cousin, who is like a big brother to me, was incarcerated in San Quentin State Prison at the same time as Oscar. They were close. It was something that my cousin never really talked about, but when he found out that I was doing a movie he told me that they used to talk all the time. The first thing that my cousin said is that he was always smiling. He was genuinely in a good mood all the time, even when he was locked up.

KA: You've been criticised for giving Oscar a happy disposition?

RC: Right, right. That is kind of what is interesting about the film, a lot of times people would question if that was realistic, and talking to

people that knew him, they would say he was a dude who didn't really show how he was feeling too much. He was always concerned with making people around him feel good.


KA: It's been said that *Fruitvale Station* spins the story to downplay the fact that Oscar was an ex-con in an attempt to make the police look even more at fault for killing him?


RC: Right, and he was an ex-con. But it's really people's views of what an ex-con is that is the issue. That idea that an ex-con is supposed to be walking around, pissed off all day, beating people up and that he can't walk around with a smile or help someone in a store – the people who talk like that are people who don't know people who have been to jail.

KA: So what do you think made the difference for you – that led you into filmmaking rather than crime?

RC: My parents more than anything. My parents stayed away from crime. My pop worked as a counsellor in juvenile hall and my mum, she basically managed the finances in a non-profit in Oakland. They were both from Oakland and grew up in a crazy time so they were familiar with the issues and wary of the signs. My parents would warn me off hanging out with certain kids and it would turn out that they knew the kid's parents or would recognise certain elements. I'm 27 now, and I'd be goddamned if they weren't often right, so I had parents that kind of navigated the traps.

KA: You live in the Bay Area, better known today for championing gay rights. The Black Panther Party started there. Do you see a common struggle?

RC: It goes hand in hand. I often hear people make the distinction and you hear this a lot, they'll say that being African-American is something you can't hide, but you can function in society without people knowing who is sleeping in your bed. Some people also think that homosexuals have a choice in the matter. It's ridiculous to think that. The fight is definitely one and the same, if you are going to fight for people's rights and the freedom to be accepted than you have to fight over them all. 

 ***Fruitvale Station* is released in the UK on 6 June and is reviewed on page 62**



A day in the life: *Fruitvale Station*

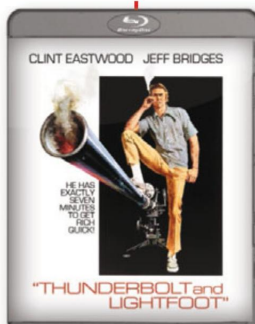
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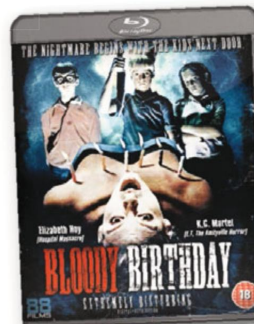
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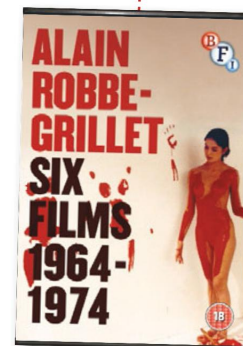


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FUGITIVE PIECES

Why do we recall movies in static fragments when we remember the rhythmic flow of songs – and is there a lesson here for filmmakers?



By Mark Cousins

Do you ever wake up with a song in your head? In the shower this morning, mine was Glen Campbell singing 'Wichita Lineman'.

Before that, for months it was 'Good Morning Starshine', from *Hair*. (If you don't know it, DON'T listen to it – it'll take over your inner life). And for decades now, Adolph Deutsch's title music to Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* has been my dawn chorus.

Do we wake up with a film in our head, as if someone pressed play when the central heating came on, half an hour before the alarm clock rings? I don't, at least not in the same way that I do with a song. In the morning I have static images in my head, not moving ones. Yesterday I watched the Columbia musical *The Jolson Story* (1946), directed by Alfred E. Green. This morning, I don't have the film's story in my head, its flow, the way I have the flow of 'Wichita'. Instead, in the shower as I sang 'Wichita' I saw close-ups of Larry Parks, who plays Jolson, sometimes in blackface. These images were like isolated frame-grabs, as if the DVD has stuck.

Why do I recall the movement of 'Wichita' but fragments of Jolson? Partly because of things particular to *The Jolson Story*. The flow of the film is fake. In real life, Jolson's mother died young, he had siblings, and two wives before he met Ruby Keeler. In the movie, his mother is alive and cooking, he has no siblings, and was chaste until he meets the Keeler character (named Julie Benson in the film). Hollywood papered over the cracks. I knew this before I watched *The Jolson Story*, so saw fissures where Hollywood wanted me not to.

Then there's the shock of blackface: Jolson was a passionate campaigner for African-American rights from 1911; musicians and historians, black and white, have argued that his minstrel show make-up can be interpreted ambiguously, as some sort of Jewish/African-American solidarity; and Larry Parks was a famous liberal and HUAC blacklistee. But if anything is going to oil an image so that it slips into our nightmares, black boot-polish on a white face will. Add to this the fact that the Jolson performance numbers, where the blackface appears, were directed not by Green, but by *noir* maestro Joseph H. Lewis, and we get a second reason why they pack such a disturbing psychic punch.

But it's not just *The Jolson Story* that I remember this way. Most of my movie memories are just moments. Films are, of course, dozens of still images per second, and critics have described how filmic story flow often gives way to set-piece spectacle, display, a paused scene to gratify a gendered or fascinated gaze – the first glimpse of the mothership in



Close Encounters, Garbo's face in *Queen Christina*, Rosebud burning at the end of *Citizen Kane*, the end of the crane shot over the train station in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the red devil in *Post Tenebras Lux*, etc. In such moments, the film seems to tremble like a ballet dancer trembles when she is holding a pose *en pointe*. The film becomes a hysteric in the 19th-century sense, it acquires the stage make-up and wide-eyed stare of Moira Shearer in *The Red Shoes*.

As soon as I wake up, before I put on my make-up, it's these images – frozen, or trembling the way a freeze-frame on a VCR used to tremble – that are in my head. They hover like humming-bird wings, scary in their delicacy. Psychologists talk of traumatic visual memory in similar terms. An image of a violent act experienced or witnessed gets stuck in a patient's head, hovering in the present, refusing to get consigned to the past and, therefore, to be calmed. It does not get stored away and therefore doesn't need to be retrieved, it's endlessly there, the ongoing moment. Neuroscientific research suggests

The shock of cinema, the trauma of its size, perhaps means that it is stored as stutters. It is terabytes, songs are megabytes

that our rear parietal cortex can store only limited amounts of visual information in its short-term memory, but if we are hyper-aroused (due to fear, or David Lynch, or the visual shock of blackface, for example) at the moment of that storage, then perhaps the normal fade of forgetting doesn't take place. The visual isotope fails to decline to half-life.

Movies are an ongoing moment. Garbo's face never dies. Age will not weary Wallace Beery. The shock of cinema, the trauma of its size, its light tsunami, perhaps means that it is stored as stutters. It is terabytes, songs are megabytes.

If this is how we remember movies, has it any implication for how we make them? Maybe Howard Hawks's famous advice – make a few good scenes and, the rest of the time, don't annoy the audience – is wise because movies go in in moments and come out again, or remain, in the same way. Maybe Alfred Hitchcock's sense that his films were a series of set pieces – being buzzed by a crop-duster, the tromboning of a steep church steeple as you climb it – was born of that wisdom too. Perhaps, in his staccato, Eisenstein was thinking these thoughts. It's something that Kira Muratova knows well.

Perhaps in the shower this morning I was Janet Leigh. Movies came at me in shards, shocks, like a knife. Not remotely as Glen Campbell would have it – far from gentle on my mind. **S**

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ROMAN POLANSKI: A FILM MEMOIR

15



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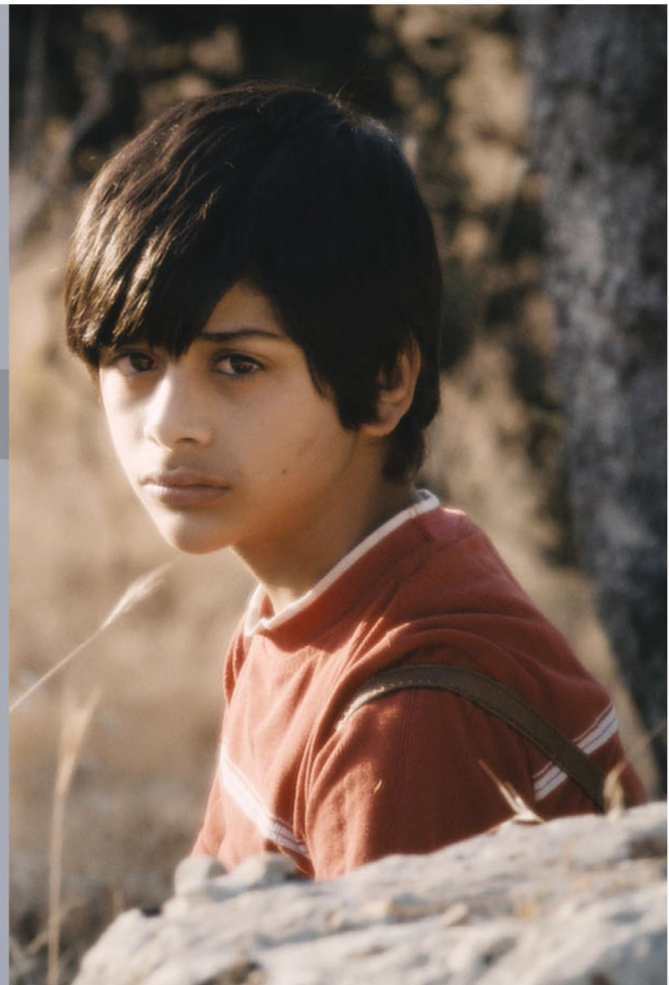
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FILIPINO SPIRIT

The spotlight on Filipino cinema at the recent Terracotta Film Festival in London revealed an industry in rude health

By Anton Bitel

For Westerners, the exotica of the Far East has never been closer, including its treasure house of cinema. Yet, as always, the curious viewer first needs to know what's out there. This is where festivals like Terracotta (23 May – 1 June) come in, not just showcasing films from those nations – Japan, Korea, China, Thailand – that have come to dominate the export markets of the Far East, but also casting light on national cinemas traditionally under-represented in the West.

This year, alongside many of the usual suspects, from Tony Jaa's latest vehicle of *muay thai* ultraviolence *Warrior King 2* to Kim Ki-duk's comically controversial castration shocker *Moebius*, there was a special strand putting a spotlight on cinema from the Philippines.

"What do you remember about Weng Weng?"

This is Australian filmmaker Andrew Leavold's very first question when granted a special audience with Imelda Marcos, infamous former first lady of the Philippines. The eponymous subject of Leavold's *The Search for Weng Weng* (2013) was the star of a number of low-brow, nuance-blind action pictures in the early 1980s.

Born Ernesto de la Cruz, and with a growth deficiency, by the time Weng Weng became an actor (of sorts) he was an adult in the body of a small child, ensuring that he cut a striking, if diminutive, figure on screen. For a few years, Weng Weng was the country's mascot and an international star, before he died, impoverished and forgotten, in 1992.

Overlapping to a degree with Mark Hartley's *Machete Maidens Unleashed!* (2010), Leavold's quest to uncover the man behind the legend becomes an affectionate if bittersweet history of Filipino exploitation cinema – and, of course, stars like Weng Weng were the most exploited of all, by money-grabbing producers, rubbernecking viewers and even heads of state.

"The appearance of Weng Weng showed the great Filipino spirit," Marcos tells Leavold. "They can make a hero of a disabled, distorted guy – so everybody had a chance." The talking heads have nothing but contempt for Imelda and her husband, but all admit grudgingly that it was a time when the Filipino film industry flourished as never before – or since.

The industry is, however, enjoying something of a renaissance, and not just for producing generic crap spiced with a dash of local colour – although Erik Matti's *Tikik: The Aswang Chronicles* (2012), which screened as part of this year's 'Terror Cotta Horror All-Nighter', comes very close.

City slacker Makoy (Dingdong Dantes) arrives in remote Pulpandan hoping to woo back his pregnant ex Sonia (Lovi Poe), only to find himself trapped with her family by local bloodsuckers that want Sonia's baby for their late-night supper. This is the first Filipino film to have been shot entirely using green-screen



Shoot to kill: Erik Matti's *On the Job* evokes the very best conspiracy thrillers from the 1970s

chroma key, so there are at least some oddly stylised backgrounds against which all the one-dimensional characters can play out their sub-*Night of the Living Dead* siege routines.

So it's hard to believe that, only a year later and for half the budget, the same director should make a gritty crime drama shot handheld and grounded in realities ripped straight from the headlines. Yet Matti's festival opener *On the Job* (2013) is an audacious trawl through the gutter of Manila's political structures, evoking the very best conspiracy thrillers of the 70s while remaining utterly contemporary and local. Its parallel tales of convicts granted day release to carry out political assassinations, and of police struggling to uphold the law against bent lawmakers, anatomise a nation in which corruption has seeped into every layer of society. There is, almost inevitably, a US remake in the works, to be directed by Baltasar Kormákur.

"I don't know what I want to do, I have so many goals," says Estela (Yeng Constantino) in Siege Ledesma's *Shift* (2013). "I want to be a super songwriter, I want to own an artsy-fartsy cafe bar, win a national art award, be a

photojournalist. I'm only here so I can fund my impractical dreams and eventually move out."

'Here' is the call centre where Estela does shift work with a group of other graduates, all qualified merely by their ability to speak fluent English. *Shift* is preoccupied with characters stuck between their pasts and their futures – but it is also brisk and breezy, and feels as though it has something new to say about the lives of educated twentysomethings in modern Manila.

In a workplace marked by its erotic diversity, Estela's own ambiguous sexuality, as well as her virginity, serves to mark her inchoate (or at least arrested) state, neither yet this nor that. And her growing desire for openly gay colleague Trevor (Felix Roco) reflects her serial pursuit of the impossible, in life as much as in love.

The most elusive and abstract film in the Philippines strand was also my favourite. Raya Martin's *How to Disappear Completely* (2013) begins with a man being terrorised by a short-haired girl (Ness Roque). As his nose begins mysteriously to bleed, she says, "I want to kill. I want to kill you. I want to kill all of you," adding, "I want to kill my feelings."

In answer to his question "Why?", there is a flashback to her stifling home life a year earlier. The girl's mother (Shamaine Buencamino) warns her of an old woman's ghost that wanders about at night in search of a daughter lost to a tsunami, and tells stories of girls willingly engaging in incestuous acts with their father. Meanwhile the girl's own father drinks heavily and visits his daughter's bedroom at night.

Clearly something has to give – but in this strange, menacing story, it remains unclear whether the girl and other young people on the island have gone mad, been possessed or just absorbed the buzzing psychic wash all around. *How to Disappear Completely* is a haunting, apocalyptic vision that hypnotises the viewer into a trance state while establishing an almost tangible sense of approaching dread. **S**



A full version of this report appears at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

The Filipino industry is enjoying a renaissance and not just for producing generic crap spiced with a dash of local colour



How to Disappear Completely

DEVELOPMENT TALE

LILTING



Language barriers: Pei-pei Cheng and Ben Whishaw as the dead Kai's mother and lover in *Lilting*

Hong Khaou's touching drama *Lilting* underwent numerous transformations on its slow journey from stage play to the big screen

By Charles Gant

In January this year, *Lilting*, the debut feature from Hong Khaou, opened the World Cinema Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival. It went on to be bought for theatrical distribution in key territories, including the US, Japan, Australia, France, Germany and Spain. Thanks to the casting of Ben Whishaw in the lead role, the UK's Artificial Eye had already come in at script stage. Made for just £120,000 and shot on a tight schedule of 17 days, *Lilting* had overcome its limited resources to become the latest seemingly-from-nowhere success story. Yet in an earlier incarnation, *Lilting* had experienced successive rejection and was left in limbo for the better part of a decade.

Khaou studied film and video at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design in Farnham, and went on to serve as a camera assistant and uncredited writer on Singapore kung fu-disco

hybrid *Forever Fever* (1998), before becoming a runner at Ridley Scott Associates' pop video arm Black Dog. Despite these experiences within the film industry – or maybe because of them – he felt that theatre represented his best chance of breaking in as a writer, and first wrote *Lilting* as a stage play. "I joined a lot of theatre companies' young writers' groups," Khaou says. "I thought that was a good way to learn how to write."

Born in Cambodia in 1975, Khaou was then displaced to Vietnam with his parents and siblings, and came with them to England as refugees in 1983. His father died two years later, while his mother, who was left alone to bring up four children in a foreign country, never assimilated or learned to speak English. His mother's situation inspired *Lilting*, Khaou explains: "It's not autobiographical, but the premise is very personal. What would happen to my mother if her lifeline, which is us, was taken away? How would she cope?" In his play, this woman has an adult daughter, an only child, who has died. "The daughter's English husband carries the guilt of what to do with the mother-in-law, with whom he's unable to communicate."

Lilting earned its first public performance at London's Soho Theatre, as part of a festival of

new writers. "They came to see it, gave notes," Khaou says. "I felt they thought it wasn't right for them for whatever reason." The budding playwright received a more enthusiastic response from London's Bush Theatre and then from the Hampstead Theatre, which staged two readings of the piece, but neither opted to put the play into production.

With Khaou then landing a full-time job at UK distribution company Peccadillo, which specialises in gay and arthouse films, his hopes of staging *Lilting* were put on permanent hold. Promoted to head of home entertainment, he was kept amply busy, but during his long stint at the company he also managed to direct two short films, *Summer* (2006) and *Spring* (2011), made in his holidays. The latter was accepted into the Sundance Film Festival – an "incredible experience" that inspired Khaou to make the next step: "I decided I had to give a feature film a go or else I'd always be thinking, 'What if?' and 'If only'."

It was at this point that Film London and BBC Films' Microwave scheme called for its latest round of applicants. Launched in 2006 to create British micro-budget features (initially £100,000, £120,000 at the time of *Lilting*, now £150,000), the programme saw early success with Eran

Creevy's *Shifty* and has gone on to produce Ben Drew's *Ill Manors* – both featuring Riz Ahmed in lead roles. “I decided to go for it,” Khaou says.

The aspiring feature director initially toyed with adapting another play he had written – *It's a Long Road, There's No Turning Back* – before deciding it wouldn't work for Microwave. *Lilting*, however, was originally set largely in one location – the retirement home of the grieving mother – and, even when opened out for a film version, it seemed achievable on the budget.

In reimagining *Lilting* for the screen, Khaou made one crucial change, switching the gender of the deceased child to male, and the sexual orientation to gay. Now the surviving partner (played by Whishaw in the film) must deal with his boyfriend's mother (Pei-pei Cheng), with whom he doesn't share a language, while also deciding how to tell her about the true nature of his relationship with her dead son. “I just felt it added another layer,” Khaou says. “It makes the story richer when you have the son carrying a secret, and that secret is carried on to the lover. It gave it more dramatic tension.”

Lilting was shortlisted for the Microschool, which involved five days of intensive workshops. Khaou was assigned two mentors – Clio Barnard (*The Selfish Giant*) and Peter Ettedgui (*Onegin*) – and he completed further drafts in response to their input. Seeking a producer partner, he turned to Dominic Buchanan (*Gimme the Loot*). Finally, after the project had been given the go-ahead, Microwave's Mia Bays fed back notes from everyone on the greenlight panel: BBC

Despite his experiences within the film industry – or maybe because of them – Khaou felt that theatre was his best chance

Films' Steve Jenkins, Artificial Eye's Louisa Dent, Vertigo's Allan Niblo plus Film London's Maggie Ellis, Adrian Wootton and chairman David Parfitt.

“The biggest change really came from Clio when she helped me move a key scene to create a pivotal place in the story,” says Khaou. While the screenplay retains the deceased son Kai, who is seen in flashbacks and appears in scenes with his mother as a hallucinatory presence, the film jettisons an additional eight-year-old version of this character. “It worked in the readings of the play,” Khaou says, “with the younger and adult version in the same room at the same time. But it would have been a challenge to make work on screen, and complicated and expensive. One of the notes from Clio and Peter was to get rid of him.”

Considering the modest nature of Microwave's investment (50 per cent of the film's total £120,000 budget), the development process seems surprisingly attentive – some might even say intrusive. But in *Lilting*'s case it's hard to argue that it hasn't been helpful, and Khaou felt able to filter the advice he was being given. “Even if you don't act on all the notes,” he says, “sometimes when you hear what they have to say, it can confirm that that's where you don't want to go. Everything's good in that sense. It gave me confidence to stick with my decisions.” ☺

THE NUMBERS THE LUNCHBOX

By Charles Gant

When Curzon Artificial Eye acquired Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* at last year's Cannes Film Festival, the track record for arthouse Indian films in the UK was not particularly encouraging. While British Indian audiences have been flocking to Bollywood films in UK multiplexes since the late 90s – *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* proved a particular breakthrough when it grossed £2.5 million in 2001 – arthouse titles from the region have been hard to position. Even Asif Kapadia's double Bafta-winning *The Warrior* – a British film but shot in India, in Hindi – proved less than a commercial slam-dunk, with box office of £147,000.

However, Curzon was encouraged by what it identified as a potentially crowd-pleasing title, starring Irrfan Khan as a widower whose life improves when delicious lunchboxes start being delivered by mistake to his desk. Curzon's Jonathan Rushton says, “It had a few ingredients to it. It was uplifting. It felt like it could be positioned as a feel-good film, where you're taking a holiday in Mumbai, and one of the characters is the food.”

To understand the premise of the film, uninitiated audiences would first have to learn about India's *dabbawalas*, who pick up hot lunchboxes from wives in the morning and deliver to the offices of their spouses – although ultimately Curzon did achieve a trailer that communicated the central love story without assuming this expository burden.

Opting to present the film through its Curzon Home Cinema video-on-demand service simultaneously with the theatrical release, the distributor sacrificed the chance to play the film in multiplex sites (which demand a four-month window before home availability). “That was one of the challenges,” Rushton explains. “There are traditional Bollywood sites, particularly Cineworld and Vue, in places in and around London and Birmingham. We made the discovery with [Michael Winterbottom's] *Trishna* that these non-Bollywood films don't necessarily do much box office in those sites.



Tasty little earner: *The Lunchbox*

We had a second worry with *The Lunchbox* that it had already opened in India, which raises piracy concerns. It might be that some of this audience had already seen the film.”

Perhaps as a self-fulfilling prophecy, *The Lunchbox* scored best in traditional arthouse venues, and its top five sites to date are all London Curzons – Soho, Mayfair, Richmond, Chelsea and Renouir – with Watershed Bristol and Cambridge Picturehouse the top earners outside the capital. Adds Rushton, “Anecdotally, from cinema managers, Indian audiences, more so than usual for our films, did travel to the cinemas where it was working to watch *The Lunchbox*.”

Curzon's hunch that *The Lunchbox* would prove a word-of-mouth hit with audiences proved well-founded, with £461,000 to date, an impressive multiple of 7.3 times the opening weekend figure of £63,000. Although the film faced competition for the arthouse audience from John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* on its opening date, Curzon hoped that the market could accommodate both films. “We were selling a trip to Mumbai,” Rushton says. “They were selling a whole different thing. The truth is, there wasn't a clear date in this period, and we got the weekend we wanted. And then when you start looking at week two and week three, there were some good films arriving but there wasn't one that came in and wiped everything out. There was no *Grand Budapest Hotel*.” ☺

ARTHOUSE INDIAN CINEMA AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Lunchbox	2014	£461,496*
Bandit Queen	1995	£282,458
Salaam Bombay!	1989	£212,494
Fire	1998	£99,738
Earth	1999	£98,916
Peepli Live	2010	£91,931
Dance of the Wind	1998	£58,283
The Big City (rerelease)	2013	£37,275
The Terrorist	2001	£35,771
Pathar Panchali (rerelease)	2002	£20,206

*still on release

BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

The UK Film Centre in Cannes had a lot to celebrate this year, but perhaps it's not the best place to try to tout brand new projects



By Ben Roberts

In my former life as a sales agent, Cannes was a bit of a slog: nine or so days lived out in an apartment-turned-office looking

down on the Croisette, but bearing little or no resemblance to the festival taking place below.

It was dawn to dusk peddling, punctuated by occasional descents into the *real* festival when we happened to have a film playing. Pity the poor sales agent – imagine pitching *For Those in Peril* to a foreign distributor in search of the next *Twilight*, and then imagine doing that a dozen times a day for nine days straight.

So to an extent, Cannes is now something of a relief and even a pleasure. With a strong showing from the Brits, we began the festival celebrating *Mr. Turner* and *Catch Me Daddy*, and ended it on a high with Ken Loach and *Pride*, for which I had spent the week anxiously tubthumping in the form of Pits & Perverts T-shirts, at press events and interviews, chatting up distributors and anyone who would listen.

In between, the order of the day was a bucketful of panels and events at the UK Film Centre in the International Village – a group of white marquees sandwiched between the Palais and the sea, and housing numerous international pavilions and stands.

The UK Film Centre has always been something of a necessary evil. It's ludicrously expensive to build and run, but it is almost impossible to imagine not having an official presence at the biggest date in the film calendar. To justify the cost, we were determined to raise the bar in terms of events held at the centre, and those who use it. A still newish WE ARE UK FILM brand has pulled all the attending agencies and messages under one (pink) umbrella and where possible we have tried to give all events at the Centre an international purpose – to engage an audience that we couldn't in London.

In terms of events, it was the best year yet. Filmmaker interviews with Mike Leigh and Dick Pope, Daniel Wolfe and Andrew Hulme, and practical financing and co-production sessions drew crowds. But most of the audience were familiar faces: aspiring Brits. We hosted a 'Meet the Film Fund' panel where I suspect 90 per cent of the audience were UK filmmakers looking to get their feature off the ground, and I chaired a session on financing budgets over £10 million in front of an ambitious audience.

Easy financing is hard to come by in Cannes as sales agents and distributors are focused on selling their existing slates



Pits and perverts: Matthew Warchus's *Pride*

The easy reach and relative affordability of Cannes have always made it a magnet for hopeful British filmmakers and producers. But while there is a lot to be said for networking with a critical mass at Cannes, touting new, unpackaged and unfinanced projects at festivals can be a thankless task: easy financing is hard to come by, sales agents and distributors are focused on selling their existing slates, exec producers hold court promising largely fictitious financing.

My advice is: consider avoiding Cannes, but if you are determined to go, then don't spend too much time in sessions or meetings you could cover at home (and you can watch UK Film Centre events online at weareukfilm.com), save your money on expensive promotional materials, and go and watch some films instead. Focus on the first and the second features, educate yourself on the competition, take inspiration from the creative successes, and learn from the failures.

Unlike the packed out 'Magic F.r.o.m.' event, a relatively small crowd gathered on a hungover Monday morning for the launch of the rebooted Microwave, the very low (*circa* £150k) budget Film London production scheme that is offering a real opportunity to six talented filmmaking teams.

Having not supported Microwave previously, we had wondered if perhaps this level of budget was really too much of a challenge – maybe the thin crowd in Cannes would suggest it's a scary or an unappealing prospect, and perhaps even too much of a real opportunity for some.

It can be brutal, but ultimately talent wins out, and this is about creating opportunities when they are thin on the ground. Festivals are peppered with low-budget discoveries. Microwave alumnus Eran Creevy is in production on his third film, *Autobahn*, having shown his chops on *Shifty*. Gareth Edwards has made one of the most enviable career leaps in memory from *Monsters to Godzilla* and now *Star Wars*. And while these breakouts often happen in a genre space, the scheme really found its mojo with Hong Khaou's superb if low-key *Lilting*, which quietly convinces you of a major new talent.

Our hope is that Microwave – and other low-budget schemes like the Welsh Cinematic and iFeatures (look out for Guy Myhill's superb *The Goob*) – can throw a light on a few filmmakers who really mean business.

All the business cards and introductions in the world can't compete with raw talent. [@bfbiben](https://twitter.com/bfbiben)

IN PRODUCTION

● **Andrea Arnold** is to shoot her fourth feature, *American Honey*, in the USA this summer. The film is based on a script written by Arnold herself, and reportedly follows a runaway teenager on a road trip across the US which involves partying, drugs, sex – and selling magazine subscriptions.

● **Paolo Sorrentino** is following the success of *The Great Beauty* with an English-language film, *The Early Years* (previously entitled *In the Future*). The Italian director has secured the services of Rachel Weisz, Michael Caine, Paul Dano, Willem Dafoe, Jane Fonda and Harvey Keitel for the project, which has Caine as a distinguished conductor on holiday in the Alps being cajoled out of retirement by an emissary from the Queen.

● **Tomas Alfredson**, the Swedish director of *Let the Right One In* and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is to direct an adaptation of Jo Nesbø's bestselling crime novel *The Snowman*. The film is a co-production between Working Title and Alfredson's own Another Park Films. Martin Scorsese, who at one stage was interested in directing, is to executive produce.

● **Steven Spielberg** is to direct an adaptation of Roald Dahl's much-loved book *The BFG*. It's unclear from reports if the film will be live-action or animated, like the 1989 version voiced by David Jason and Amanda Root. Spielberg is also at work on an as-yet-untitled Cold War thriller: Tom Hanks will play James Donovan, a lawyer who went behind the Iron Curtain to secure the release of downed U2 pilot Gary Powers, and the Coen brothers are polishing the script.

● **Woody Allen** is set to begin shooting his next film in July. Joaquin Phoenix and Emma Stone are the first cast members confirmed for the as-yet-untitled project.

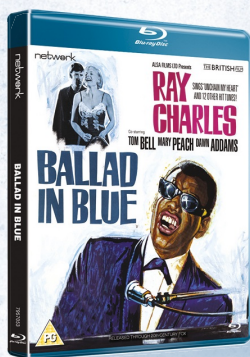
● **Miike Takashi** has begun production on his next film, an action fantasy entitled *Yakuza Apocalypse*. The film stars Ichihara Hayato as a vampire who joins the yakuza and quickly becomes a crime kingpin. The film is the seventh in three years for the prolific Japanese director, and Miike promises it will be a return to former glories: "Goodbye to tediously boring Japanese films," Miike wrote in a statement. "No one wanted this to happen, but I am making a rampage back to the basics!"

● **Jia Zhangke** (below) announced in Cannes that his next film is likely to be *Mountains May Depart*, a drama starring his wife and regular actress Zhao Tao as a woman from Shanxi province who leaves her boyfriend for a wealthy mine-owner. The film is reportedly to be set in three different time periods: 1999, 2014 and 2025.



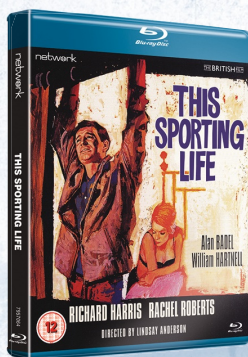
BRITISH CLASSICS ON **BLU-RAY** THIS JUNE

THE BRITISH FILM



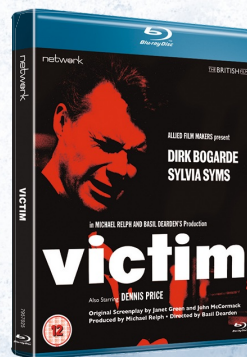
Ballad In Blue
Ray Charles' only major film appearance.

OUT NOW



This Sporting Life
Richard Harris gives a career best performance.

OUT NOW



Victim
Dirk Bogarde stars in the controversial classic.

OUT 16 JUNE



The Four Feathers
Alexander Korda's Oscar nominated adaptation.

OUT 23 JUNE

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LIFE ON THE MARGINS

New laws in the UK requiring the classification of previously exempt films risk adding to the financial woes of niche distributors

By Anton Bitel

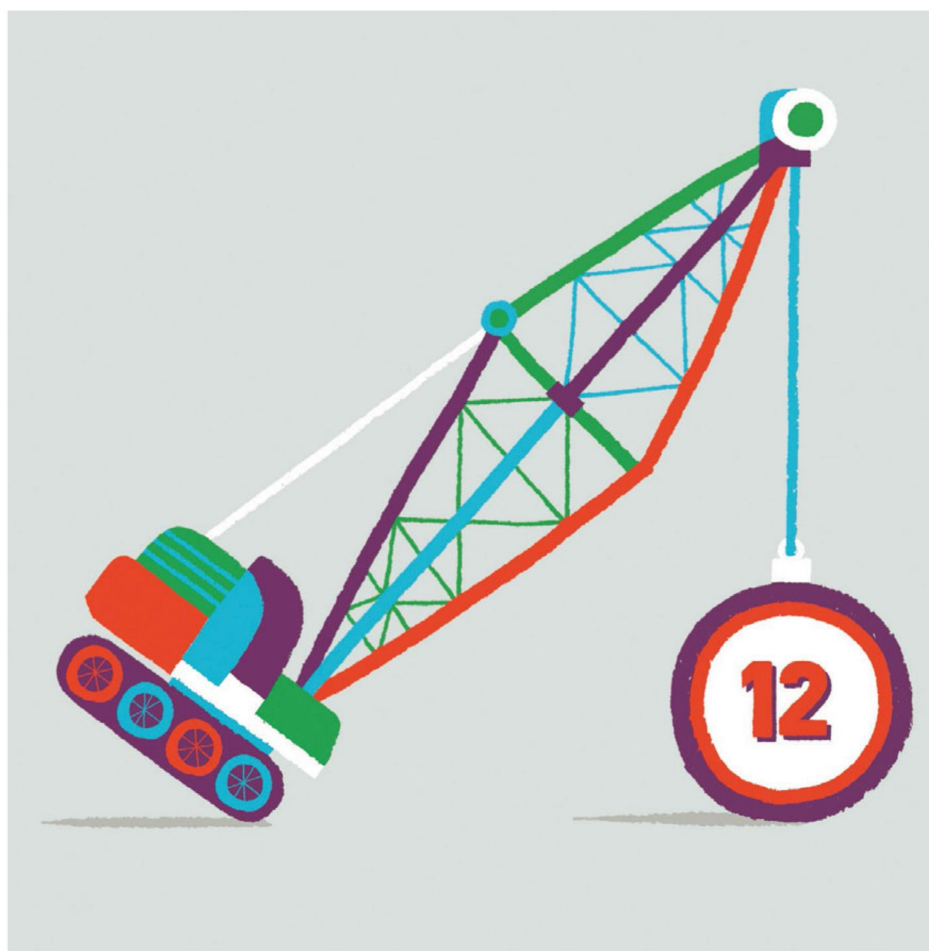
Born in a climate of moral panic over unregulated 'video nasties', the 1984 Video Recordings Act (VRA) legislated for age rating of videos through the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Only the genres of music, sport, religious and educational (the last category conventionally includes documentary features and the 'extras' on home releases) were exempt from classification, unless they contained certain types of adult material strong enough to incur an 18 certificate.

The end of the noughties brought a new moral panic. As risqué music videos were getting the tabloids hot and bothered, the BBFC approached the British Video Association (BVA) and the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) about tightening the VRA's exemption thresholds. The new Con-Lib coalition happily embraced the outgoing government's commitment to consult on VRA reform, and found support in both the Bailey review (2011) of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, and in the *Daily Mail's* prurient campaigning. The consultation finally took place in 2012.

BVA director-general Lavinia Carey recounts the preliminaries to this consultation: "We'd been looking at harm to children, and we were aiming at 18 and 15 material, but [the DCMS] said, 'No no, it's got to be down to 12.'" An official explained to a puzzled Carey that the DCMS was doing this "because we can". So the BVA, BBFC and other organisations fell in behind the government's preferred option, which was to require that any previously exempt material likely to be rated 12 or above be classified by the BBFC. Now, given that children under 12 may continue watching Miley Cyrus's unregulated gyrations in their preferred media of television and the internet (beyond VRA jurisdiction), the DCMS's sledgehammer seems unlikely to have cracked this particular nut – but it will come in like a wrecking ball upon the balance sheets of the smaller independent video distributors whose inability to afford BVA membership meant that they became aware of the consultation only after it was over.

The last straw?

Every time video is submitted to the BBFC, the distributor is paying for this (statutory) service, with fees determined by the submission's length and type. These costs are easily absorbed by large studio distributors, most of whom already submit exempt materials for examination anyway. The smaller independents, however, shift their niche products in relatively low quantities, and operate on much tighter margins. Any requirement to pay for more – potentially a lot more – classification may well prove the last straw. "Distributing independent, genuinely important documentaries will become nearly impossible if we are forced to get them classified as our profit on titles like these are marginal at best," says Jason Bradbury of Peccadillo Pictures. "It will definitely reduce the



Distributing independent documentaries will become nearly impossible if we are forced to get them classified

amount of documentary films released on to DVD in the UK." New Wave's Robert Beeson adds, "This amendment pulls in lots of serious documentaries that no small child would be interested in, that were previously exempt," citing from his own catalogue *Nostalgia for the Light*, *5 Broken Cameras* and *The Missing Picture*, all of which received 12 or 15 certificates for the cinema.

Several of the independents rely on extras to distinguish their product from cheaper, barebones equivalents available overseas or online – and many of these previously exempt materials will now also need to be submitted, at cost, to the BBFC. Second Run's Chris Barwick explains: "If we had to submit every DVD special feature or extra it would mean in real terms that we would have to release maybe only six or seven instead of 10 to 12 titles a year. Which in turn means we would see less revenue coming in, so it becomes a vicious circle..."

Adam Torel, from Third Window, must now reconsider releasing a special edition of Miike Takashi's *Lesson of Evil* since its unique selling point, a two-hour 'making of' film, would now incur a £1,000-plus BBFC fee – "too hard for a

company like ours with tight margins as it is." Nucleus Films' Marc Morris complains that the cost of classifying the 14 hours of material for his two documentary box-sets (focused, irony of ironies, on the 'video nasties' era) would be an unaffordable £8,000. Francesco Simeoni, of Arrow Films, concludes: "It certainly isn't helping the UK film industry or film culture."

In its final response document to the VRA consultation, the government acknowledged that the video industry as a whole would have to pay £400,000 per annum in additional classification fees to the BBFC, but concluded: "We believe that in order to maintain integrity of the system, it must be universally applied to all content that is unsuitable for children, regardless of the size or nature of the distributor [sic] involved." This fails to address the peculiar circumstances of an independent sector which, though never invited to the consultation to voice its concerns, will be disproportionately affected by these amendments to exemption. "Simply put," says James Flower from Soda Pictures, "this is a market that needs fewer handicaps placed upon it, not more."

With the VRA reforms recently passed into law, a corresponding reform to the BBFC's pricing structures and policies is the independents' last hope to restore a degree of proportionality. "The best way of mitigating the costs that doesn't involve major upheaval at the BBFC," according to Beeson, "is for them to charge for all video extras at the online pricing structure, which is 60 per cent cheaper than the video rate." He suggests

that “the reintroduction of the subtitled film discount” and “the abolition of the overzealous insistence on certifying commentaries” would also help. Terracotta’s Richard Geddes adds: “Charging for a film showing in cinemas and then charging to view and certify that exact same film [without any changes made to it] that’s released on the DVD format seems rather unnecessary.”

Flower articulates a view shared by many about making classification fees commensurate with exposure: “The problems would all be mitigated if the BBFC finally adopted a sliding scale of classification rates relative to the size of the film’s release, similar to how its Irish counterpart IFCO does. If a title is unlikely to be pressed in more than 5,000 units, why should the rates remain the same as for a big-budget Hollywood blockbuster of the same length?” Currently no UK independent can afford to release, for example, Jacques Rivette’s celebrated *Out 1*, Andrzej Wajda’s *The Ashes*, the epics of Lav Diaz, or any number of outsized Asian titles, because the costs to certify these longer-than-usual films would be prohibitive, and out of all proportion to any likely return – but this situation might change if distributors were charged less in general for the certification of low-yield titles. “The current BBFC submission charges,” Barwick says, “have a definite impact upon which films are released in the UK and certainly inform the decision-making of independent distributors when considering titles to acquire. It is again clearly unfair that a title from a small distributor has to pay the same fees as a major studio pays when they potentially will ship and sell tens of thousands of units of a title [meaning that BBFC fees are a tiny consideration in their overall budgets] when our initial ship-out would typically be less than 1,000.”

It is also unclear why extras should have to be certified for any content beyond a PG rating when they are attached to features already certified 18. Flower summarises the position: “Ultimately a common sense approach would be of use – namely, if the additional content does not break any laws or is otherwise unlikely to raise or conflict with the classification given to the main feature, the distributor should not be under pressure to submit it.”

With the ball now in the BBFC’s court, its assistant director David Austin is sounding conciliatory notes. He says the BBFC is “happy to meet any interested distributors to discuss how the system will work... looking at ways of reducing the regulatory burden on the film and video industries commensurate with our being able to fulfil our legal obligations under UK legislation”, and “working with the film and video industries on how we can lower still further the cost of classifying video works which have previously been classified for theatrical release”. Meanwhile the smaller independents are exploring ways to ensure their views are better represented. There is much at stake. As Geddes puts it, “The big issue is that several comparatively large indie labels have folded or gone on hiatus in recent years – acts like this impose further financial hurdles on existing small labels. The effect of which is less diversity of choice of films for the consumer, or driving consumers to piracy to find films that can’t be released due to these economic barriers.” ☹

PLATFORMS SMASHING WINDOWS

Netflix’s launch in Europe, with its monthly subscription model, threatens to overhaul the system of release windows on the continent

By Nick Roddick

When it arrived in the UK, Netflix was seen as just another form of home entertainment. In France, where it is to launch in September, there are those who see it as a cinematic version of Japanese knotweed, threatening to strangle the delicate blooms of the ‘*septième art*’. It probably won’t, but Netflix does pose a threat to the system of release windows into which European film distribution has coagulated over the past three decades, nowhere more so than in France.

Windows are the trade name for the hold-back period after a film’s theatrical release before it can be seen on airplanes, video-on-demand, DVD, pay-TV and free TV. In most countries, windows are informal and increasingly flexible; in France, they are law. Once Netflix launches, either the ‘*chronologie des médias*’ is going to have to change or Netflix France is going to be a sorry thing. And with more than \$9 billion already spent on programming, it seems unlikely to settle for ‘sorry’.

Currently, the platform claims 48 million subscribers (which it insists on calling ‘members’) worldwide, of whom around 35 million are in the US. How many members it has in any other of the 48 countries in which it operates, Netflix has steadfastly refused to reveal. But with North America

Perhaps film will be replaced by a cross-platform moving image business delivering product digitally to your home

close to saturation, international expansion is essential, even if one analyst expects the company initially to lose \$100 million per quarter on its upcoming European launches.

The real sticking point for the French (and a few other people besides) is that Netflix only offers a SVOD – that is, VOD by monthly subscription – service rather than TVOD, where each transaction is paid for (existing French VOD platforms offer a mix). With SVOD, no one knows – and platforms won’t tell – how many people have streamed an individual title. In this respect, SVOD goes back to the days when rights were sold outright, not licensed for a set period of time. Largely because of this, the window for SVOD in France is three years. In Germany it’s nine months, in the UK six.

As the launch date approaches, Netflix executives have been wooing the French cultural establishment. And it seems to be working, possibly because it has been hinted that, if Netflix can’t find a way of operating in France, it could always stream out of Luxembourg. The Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, representing filmmakers, has already suggested knocking a third off the SVOD window, bringing it down to just [sic] two years.

But French concerns may have the wrong focus: windows may be the least of it. Just as sport, not movies, turned out to be the big earner for pay-TV, so TV series such as *Breaking Bad*, *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black* have proved most popular on VOD. A report by US market analyst GfK USA in January claimed that only 19 per cent of content streamed on the three main US VOD platforms (Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime) consisted of movies. So perhaps what we are heading for is not a threat to the film industry, but its replacement by a cross-platform moving image business, delivering product digitally to your homescreen and relegating the movies, like the theatre, to special-event status – which is exactly what George Lucas predicted in a recent USC speech. Now that really would upset the French. ☹



Kevin Spacey in *House of Cards*, one of a number of TV series making a success of video-on-demand

CANNES

LET THERE BE LIGHT

For all the talk about the festival becoming a closed shop for a select group of directors, such as Godard, Cronenberg and the Dardennes, 2014 produced one of the best programmes in years, offering an incredibly varied range of films and at least half a dozen genuine contenders for the Palme d'Or. **By Nick James**

Towards the end of this year's Cannes, in an ebullient mood, festival head Thierry Frémaux told me, "All over the world we are constantly told that auteur cinema is under threat, yet here, once a year, what the world comes to celebrate is auteur films." Absent in recent years, constant sunshine had returned to give the town its traditional dazzle and the press had seen a mind-expanding variety of ambitious films, so who could fault Frémaux's mild crowing? The kitsch of *Grace of Monaco* had set off all the critics' steel traps, leaving the field free for what was a great one-two opening to the Competition: Abderrahmane Sissako's eloquent political tragedy *Timbuktu* and Mike Leigh's juicy testament to the hard work of art *Mr. Turner*. If one saw no absolute great works thereafter, there was a stimulating array of films that proved cinema was indeed alive and kicking. By the end, all fears that the festival might prove a stodgy usual suspects affair had been dispelled.

That said, Cannes 2014 was first and foremost an actors' festival, with major performances abounding more than major films. Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* was one exception in encompassing both, a joyously down-to-earth puncturing of biopic pomposity – which, of course, turns on Timothy Spall's harrumphing incarnation of Britain's finest painter as a bustling worker bee, essentially uninterested in anything that might keep him from his painting or drawing. Many of the set pieces are worth savouring, not least Turner's brilliant mockery of Constable's impasto-thick works, achieved with a single dab of red paint. Spall's obvious relish of Victorian phrasing is a particular comic treat. "Brook your ire, sir," may not make it into Twitterspeak, but I suspect (and I paraphrase) "May I peruse your upstairs room, madam" may inspire a parody any day now.

Bertrand Bonello's more muted biopic *Saint Laurent* was a bigger hit with the French critics, some of whom, it seems, preferred it to Leigh's film. Art-directed almost to death, this clinical film views the illustrious designer Yves (a statuesque Gaspard Ulliel) as a shy narcissist perfectionist and purveyor of extreme body

fascism. As a montage of tableaux lionising the brief period of YSL's eminence as the delineator of quintessentially French lines between 1967 and 1976, it has a certain visual grandeur, but is also at times insufferably self-satisfied. My favourite moment shows Helmut Berger, in a flash-forward, as the ageing Saint Laurent, watching his gorgeous younger self on TV (using a scene taken from Berger's performance in Visconti's *The Damned*).

Celebrity as a kind of agony was also the subject of David Cronenberg's satire of Hollywood, *Maps to the Stars*, from a script by Bruce Wagner, whose novels excoriate

Tinseltown's tawdriness. A melodrama with the proportions of Greek tragedy, *Maps* revolves around the toxic Weiss family. There's Dr Stafford Weiss (John Cusack), a suspect therapist who persuades clients that their anxieties are located in the physical body. His hard-nosed wife Cristina (Olivia Williams, enjoying showing off her rarely seen darker side) manages the career of their obnoxious 13-year-old child star son Benjie (Evan Bird), who's just out of rehab and verbally vicious – especially to the kid he's forced to co-star with in *Bad Babysitter 2*. At the film's centre are fading actress Havana (Julianne Moore), one of Dr Weiss's clients, and her assistant Agatha (Mia Wasikowska), a new arrival with a tragic past whose long black gloves help cover up the burn scars that cover much of her body. Tremendous use of ghosts depicted in hyper-real fashion – not least Havana's movie-star mother – spices things up, but the enjoyable result is not quite as sulphurous as one might hope. *Maps*'s tone sits somewhere between Ballardian liminality and *Melrose Place*. It won Moore the Best Actress prize, which might otherwise have gone to Marion Cotillard, star of the Dardennes' typically immaculate *Two Days, One Night* (see page 28).

Performance and humiliation

Juliette Binoche won Best Actress here in 2010 as the unnamed woman of shifting roles in Abbas Kiarostami's *Certified Copy*. She's again in a self-reflexive role in Olivier Assayas's *Clouds of Sils Maria*, playing Maria Enders, an actress asked by a writer she reveres to star in an on-stage remake of the film that made her career with her portrayal of a young lesbian seductress – but this time as the seduced older woman (shades of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*). But the writer dies while Enders is en route to meet him and for half the film we're as involved with Maria's personal assistant, Valentine (Kristen Stewart), as she strives to help Maria deal with her grief and doubts about taking on the role – which involves playing opposite Jo-Ann Ellis (Chloë

MY CANNES TOP TEN (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

Mr. Turner Mike Leigh
Whiplash Damien Chazelle
Maidan Sergei Loznitsa
The Wonders Alice Rohrwacher
Winter Sleep (below) Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Leviathan Andrei Zvyagintsev
Timbuktu Abderrahmane Sissako
Goodbye to Language Jean-Luc Godard
Girlhood Céline Sciamma
Jauja Lisandro Alonso





A work of art: Timothy Spall won the Best Actor prize for his role as the venerable artist in Mike Leigh's critically acclaimed *Mr. Turner*

Grace Moretz), a young Hollywood actress with behavioural issues. That first half is a unique, tantalising duet about art, but the script always feels clumsy and the second part of the film is even less secure. Despite winning and contrasting performances from Binoche and Stewart, *Clouds of Sils Maria* feels like a gallant misfire.

For great bruisingly physical and psychological acting, you won't find a more convincing trio than Steve Carell, Channing Tatum and Mark Ruffalo in **Foxcatcher**. Director Bennett Miller, of *Moneyball* fame, conceives of scene after scene of chilling humiliation in this tonally subtle true-life movie about John E. Du Pont (Carell), a super-rich sponsor who woos Olympic champion wrestler Mark Schultz (Tatum) to come to live and train at his Valley Forge estate. The relationship turns semi-abusive, with *Behind the Candelabra* overtones, as control-freak John draws in Mark's more savvy brother Dave (Ruffalo) and eventually the whole USA wrestling team, with whom John insists on posing as a coach to impress his racehorse-devoted mother (Vanessa Redgrave). A film of persistent wintry mood in hues of blue and grey, its flaw is that it keeps beating us over the head with similar observations.

In terms of pure exuberant pleasure, nothing touched **Whiplash**, the Sundance US Grand Jury prize-winner programmed in Directors' Fortnight. Its plot, which focuses on Andrew Neyman (Miles Teller), a young man who wants to be a jazz drummer in the Buddy Rich mould, might sound like a recipe for tedium, but what makes it shimmer and thrill is the antagonistic relationship he's forced into when he goes to a Juilliard-like conservatoire and meets the school's jazz master Terence Fletcher (J.K. Simmons), a vicious martinet who seems to get off on humiliating young musicians. "That's not my tempo. Are you rushing or are you dragging," he yells at Neyman, whose hands are dripping blood. The film grew out of director Damien Chazelle's short, but it's so packed with tension it feels anything but extended or thin. The calibrated facility and fluidity with which Chazelle chooses shots and cuts (he also directed 2009's *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*) surely heralds a rich directorial future.

Sexual awkwardness and non-straight desire in puberty are director Céline Sciamma's recurrent themes, as we have seen in *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy*. She has an excellent eye for composition, telling textures and the uplifting cut, and a killer ear for music. And few directors can rival her in portraying the emotional rip tides faced by young girls finding their way in the world. Right from the opening game of American football being played mostly by Franco-African *banlieue* girls, **Girlhood** (*Bande de filles*, which also screened in Directors' Fortnight) shows Sciamma employing her talents more acutely than ever. Yes, the cliché slow-mo touchdown is there, but she makes us as aware of the shiny too-big helmets and bulky padding as she does of the girls' athleticism. Although ostensibly about a 'girl gang', the film centres on Marieme (Karidja Touré), an impassive figure who lives with



Coming of age: Juliette Binoche in Olivier Assayas's 'gallant misfire' *Clouds of Sils Maria*

her mother, her bullying elder brother and two younger siblings. Furious to be told by her school that she has no future in further education, she attracts the attention of a small gang run by Lady (Assa Sylla). Marieme loves the attitudinal sense of freedom she gets from these three girls and begins to dress like them with straightened hair (instead of corn rows), a leather jacket and, ominously, with a knife in her back pocket. Sciamma is non-judgemental throughout as the girls hustle weaker kids for money and rent a hotel room to party in shoplifted dresses. *Girlhood* has heart-melting

Few directors can rival Céline Sciamma in portraying the emotional rip tides faced by girls finding their way in the world



Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood*

but tough performances from Touré and Sylla, seeing girls such as these as a vital force of the future. It's also gorgeous to look at, and were it not for a slight faltering of momentum in its final quarter would be near-perfect.

In the courtrooms

In **Timbuktu**, young Islamic fundamentalist men toting Kalashnikovs rule the town, with their leaders enforcing sharia law. A woman who sells fish is brought before the judge for baring her hands while she prepares her wares; all forms of music are banned – though some wonderfully languid and melancholy oud playing leaks out through the city at night – as is football, even though the gunmen themselves love nothing more than to compare Messi with Zidane. What's so impressive here is Sissako's lightness of tone and sense of absurdity in dealing with the repressive



Bennett Miller's *Foxcatcher*

actions of these invaders. The main tale sees Kidane (Ibrahim Ahmed) and his wife and daughter, free spirits who live in a tent out of town, become entangled in a dispute after their cow ruins some fishing nets, but the depressing poignancy of Kidane's resignation to his fate meets its gentle counterpoint elsewhere in the film in an inspiring game of football played without a ball, using only the imagination. The scene of supposed adulterers being stoned to death is presented briefly without comment for maximum power. I've never seen a film combine quiet fury, playful humour, widescreen expansiveness and tragic symbolism to such moving effect.

Mathieu Amalric's approach to his startling adaptation of the Georges Simenon novel **The Blue Room** takes its inspiration from a passage in the novel's first chapter: "What he lived through in that half-hour – no, less than that, just a few minutes of his life – was to be shattered into fragments of sight and sound, each of which would be scrutinised microscopically." The 'he' is Julien (played by Amalric himself), a small-town businessman, and the 'few minutes' relate to a seemingly inconsequential conversation he has with his mistress Esther (Stéphanie Cléau) after she bites his lip during a lovemaking session that subsequently has dramatic repercussions. The criminal actions, arrest and trial that take place afterwards come at us in shattered fragments indeed – and in a confining, bookish, Academy ratio – with matters of guilt remaining obscure. Beadily impassive throughout, Amalric gives a masterclass in understated angst in this compelling, chilly, but slightly academic crime drama.

What excites people about Xavier Dolan, it seems, are his stylistic range and ambition, and the fact that he's just 25 years old. We can all appreciate a prodigy, especially at a festival dominated by the same old names. But these attributes can turn to disadvantages. For **Mommy**, his fifth feature, Dolan makes an isolated trio of Steve (Antoine-Olivier Pilon), a 15-year-old who suffers from ADHD; Die (Ann Dorval), his 'tough cookie' widowed mom; and Kyla (Suzanne Clément), the shy neighbour who's drawn by the others' exuberant positivity. Unfortunately, so cartoonishly overwrought



Fundamental truths: Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu*

and hysterical are their posturing reactions to every trial and triumph that neither woman is convincing. Dolan's main visual innovation was to shoot in the unique ratio of 1 to 1. Pinched close-ups predominate, but he wowed watchers by breaking into widescreen when Steve extends his arms, cruciform, on a skateboard. The film looks warm and vibrant, and has its own frantic energy, but it left me cold. Dolan's talent was better demonstrated by *Laurence Anyways* and *Tom at the Farm*, so hopefully I can save my praise for the next one.

Amalric gives a masterclass in understated angst in his compelling but slightly academic crime drama 'The Blue Room'

In Russia's shadow

Winter Sleep is a different kind of epic to Nuri Bilge Ceylan's last film, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, not least because it is a relatively static film about surviving the cold season in Cappadocia that allots much of its time to shots of people gathering around stoves to chew matters over. Aydin (Haluk Bilginer), once an actor of some fame, is now an ageing hotelier who practises his charm on his tourist customers. He also draws rents from properties that his father owned, and which are managed by Hidayet (Ayberk Pekcan), his righthand man. When a rock is thrown at Aydin's orange 4x4, shattering a window, Hidayet catches the schoolboy culprit, Ilyas (Emirhan Doruktutan) and takes him to his father's house. There a row breaks out with the boy's father, Ismail (Nejat Isler), a drunk who owes Aydin rent on a property he's been evicted from. Aydin



Xavier Dolan's *Mommy*



Mathieu Amalric's *The Blue Room*

hangs back from the near-brawl, which is prevented by Ismail's obsequious brother Hamdi (Serhat Kiliç). Thus we learn that Aydin is loathed by many, and his presence even needles his much younger wife Nihal (Melisa Sözen). I'll hold back from more exposition, but as in all of Ceylan's recent films, Chekhov suffuses this world, though there is also an affinity between Aydin and Shakespeare's Lear (his hotel, built into the rocks, is called the Othello). Haluk Bilginer is the ideal greybeard charmer to play this self-deluded patriarch. In its savouring of long conversations, *Winter Sleep* is a throwback to Ceylan's debut feature *The Town* (*Kasaba*). At Cannes, the film suffered from being a difficult screening to get into. Tension was in the air as it began. The three-and-a-quarter hour work, though brilliant in many places, felt a little baggy to me. Nonetheless, it deserved the Palme d'Or.

In terms of big-beast films, *Winter Sleep*'s only rival was a genuinely Russian tale of outlying corruption and despair, Andrei Zvyagintsev's **Leviathan**, which won the Best Screenplay prize. Its hero, Kolia (Alexei Serebriakov), is a drunk who owns a large wooden house and auto-repair shop that is coveted by the equally bibulous local mayor, Vadim (Roman Madyanov), for a development project. Even in his drunken rages, Kolia constantly proclaims his love for his wife, Lilya (Elena Lyadova), a fish factory worker, and for the house itself. Vadim tries to buy Kolia off, but he won't budge, forcing the mayor through appeal after appeal before he finally hires Dmitri (Vladimir Vdovitchenkov), an ex-army buddy turned lawyer, from Moscow, to dig up dirt on him. What spills out from this scenario is an epic of blackmail, betrayal, random thuggery and family resentment that's chilling and absorbing by turns. Black humour helps us through the heavy symbolism (Russia as picked-to-the-bone whale, ruled by the triumvirate of state, church and money). The speed with which, for instance, the local magistrate reads her verdicts could rival any stock auctioneer.

Russia is the structuring absence in Sergei Loznitsa's astonishing documentary **Maidan**, which records the events in Kiev's Maidan Square between November 2013 and March

Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan*

2014. Imagine that you're seeing real history unfold, with real struggles, battles and deaths, but in a series of moving-image Breughel paintings: that's how the film makes its case. How anyone could have set up so many carefully framed locked-down cameras – most, unbelievably, close to violent action, others at a god-like panoramic distance – is a minor miracle. The major event is the people's struggle itself. Loznitsa does not shrink from the violence inflicted on the police and nor would he think about cutting out people dying at the hands of police marksmen. The images combine the banal and the dramatic as only documentary images can. The effect is cumulative, a build-up of impressions not overly driven by sensation. It's as powerful as anything in Herzog's canon.

Quests

During a freezing winter at the start of Atom Egoyan's **The Captive**, Matthew (Ryan Reynolds) watches Cassandra (Peyton Kennedy), his little daughter, figure-skating with a boy partner. Afterwards, he drives her to a pie shop and goes inside to get her something to eat. When he comes out, Cass has vanished and he is horrified when, instead of going all-out to find his daughter, the police seem

'Leviathan' is an epic of blackmail, betrayal, random thuggery and family resentment that's chilling and absorbing by turns

Tommy Lee Jones's *The Homesman*

more interested in investigating him. Tina (Mireille Enos), Matthew's distraught wife, also blames him. Eight years later, evidence comes to light that Cass has survived in the hands of a paedophile gang. Try not to read more elsewhere about the plot of this film, as one of its chief pleasures is in piecing together the time-fractured narrative and unfolding relations between the bereft family, local citizens and, in particular, Nicole (Rosario Dawson) and Jeffrey (Scott Speedman), the two cops from the child protection unit who came down so hard on Matthew. A fine slow-burn crime melodrama, *The Captive* has a similar fairytale atmosphere to that which enriched the director's *The Sweet Hereafter*. It was good to see Egoyan getting so close to his best form.

Having set himself such a high bar with *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* in 2005, Tommy Lee Jones's second theatrical feature as director was perhaps bound to disappoint. Taken from a Glendon Swarthout novel that resembles *True Grit* thematically, **The Homesman** starts with devout Christian plainswoman Mary Bee Cuddy (Hilary Swank), who ploughs her own fields during the day, then dresses all purty for a gentleman caller who turns out to be a roughneck. She nonetheless asks him to marry her, but he refuses, saying she's as plain as a pail. The film starts to come apart as soon as its implausible quest is laid out. Three local wives have gone crazy from causes to do with disease and the death of children and relatives. With no man volunteering to transport them east, Cuddy

Andrei Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan*Atom Egoyan's *The Captive*

CANNES

HARD CHOICES



The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Them

says she'll do it. En route she comes across rapsallion George Briggs (Jones), who's been sat on a horse with a noose around his neck by local vigilantes. She frees him on the proviso he helps her. Scenes of potential drama and tension are rushed in favour of other scenes of indulgent whimsy as each of the odd couple wins, inevitably, the respect of the other. The three actresses playing the mad women (Grace Gummer, Miranda Otto and Sonja Richter) are given little to do but twist in the wind of their improvisations. There are several really terrific scenes – especially one of the burning of a hotel – but the one big moment of tragedy (which I shan't reveal) is thrown away.

The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby was a confusing entry in the Un Certain Regard section because it was really just one of three films made under that title by Ned Benson, all about the same married couple splitting up. The first two films, 'Him' and 'Her', debuted at Toronto last year, the first devoted to the viewpoint of husband Conor Ludlow (James McAvoy), the second to the titular wife Eleanor (Jessica Chastain). What Cannes showed was part three, 'Them'. I confess I've not seen the first two, but I found the third a compelling and convincing weepie, with sensitive performances all round, albeit one that's as corny as you might expect. Jessica Chastain could not have been better as the grieving young mother trying to remake her life alone. I could watch her for hours. Terrence Malick trained me.

One big hit in the deal-making quarters of Cannes was Ruben Ostlund's **Force Majeure**, which has all the sheen you hope for in high-quality Swedish productions about the middle class under pressure, but adds a sly humour and a sharp eye for telling locations and sharp compositions. It concerns a Swedish family enjoying a few days skiing in the French Alps and turns around a moment as they are eating together out on their hotel terrace when what the father, Tomas (Johannes Bah Kuhnke), initially thinks is a controlled avalanche comes rushing towards them. How Tomas reacts when he starts to realise the threat might be real appals Ebba (Lisa Loven Kongsli), the mother, and the rest of the film enjoys his discomfort to the maximum. Since it plays brilliantly to the crowd and is only slightly pleased with itself, you can expect *Force Majeure* to turn up on UK screens sooner or later. It is auteur cinema with wide appeal, and we need more of that. 📌



For more coverage of the films in the festival, see bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

Jane Campion, the Competition jury president, on the vexed issue of how to compare oranges and bananas in the selection process

Being here at this festival as a filmmaker is a terrifying prospect. I'm like a dog that's been too many times in and out of the kennel not to be aware of what a gladiatorial experience it can be. Just when you've started to feel good, you get side-swiped massively. Suddenly you feel like shit. Emotionally it takes you up to such a high place as you walk up the red carpet and you think, "Well, I must have accomplished something." And then someone says you shouldn't be there, or your work's crap. They say it in articles, they don't say it to you, they're too polite for that – well, in the old days they used to be pretty rude. So it's a very extreme experience for filmmakers.

What I find exciting about cinema is when it's focused on a personal vision, a way of talking about the world that's unique – that is what this Competition selection is all about. I have an enormous respect for it. I've been thinking about film all my life and intensely interested in it for 35 years. That's why they select you. You've got a fully formed view of what art is, what cinema is. You may not know everything, but as a practitioner I have clear views on what I like. It's always to do with some way the filmmaker is bringing you towards a way of seeing yourself or helping people see themselves. That's the art of being human, to become aware. Some films, more entertainment-model films, will try and buddy up to you, try and win your approval rather than bare themselves to you. They're a testament to nothing apart from "let's have a good time", telling lies about life and ourselves. I don't mind a good piece of entertainment as long as it's well done. I always hold up *Alien* as being a brilliant action film, art film crossover. It has a really interesting female protagonist who doesn't take shit from anyone – you don't see them much any more. Sigourney Weaver is incredibly attractive but she doesn't wear her sexuality. She's wearing baggy trousers and is just trying to look after the ship.

I was jury president of the shorts last year. I had the opportunity to see the festival from start to finish as I also got a career prize from Directors' Fortnight. I was very moved by how hard I saw the staff working and how much they saw the festival as being about the filmmakers and giving them the best opportunity. I saw it from a different perspective from my normal terrified filmmaker point of view. I think [Cannes festival head] Thierry Frémaux thought I did well with that jury and he asked me what I thought about coming back next year and being president of the main jury. I remember saying, "No, that's impossible. I've got nothing to wear." It wasn't just that, but the thought of all the red carpets, the premieres and all the photos. He said, "You can do it in your own way." On the trip back to New Zealand



Judge and jury: Jane Campion

I've been thinking about films all my life. That's why they select you. You have a fully formed view of what cinema is

I had time to reflect on what an incredible film festival it is and how I got my start here. By the time I got off the plane, I emailed him and said, "I'm yours, if you still want me. I'll woman up to this and manage." Then I had to wait. I thought he was pretty pissed off with me for being a wimp. But then six months later I got an email from him saying, "I want you to be my president."

Being on a jury is painful in a way because each time you see a film you think, "There are great qualities there, but how are you going to compare this orange with this banana?" It's such an absurd task in a way. And then all the jury have different fruits they would pick.

All the jury are adults. I didn't worry about any of them not getting to any of the screenings on time or sober or anything like that. I did worry about those coming from faraway countries and who didn't speak English or French so well. I wanted to make sure that they felt that they were heard and listened to. In the meetings everyone seemed comfortable to express themselves. We had three translators. You have to pay attention to make sure that everyone feels that their presence is important.

Sometimes the job of the president is to skew or shepherd opinions, to remind ourselves of what we're doing here, why we're choosing what. So it's not just the two hours that went past the fastest, but what the real considerations are. And to think about how this film will look in two or ten years' time, to really think deeply about whose career it is going to launch and to keep the conversation focused on what qualities a Palme d'Or winner really needs to have. 📌

Interview by Isabel Stevens

EXPERIMENTS AND EXTREMITIES



The road to utopia: Viggo Mortensen in Lisandro Alonso's Patagonian period drama *Jauja*

For the novice – and the old hand, come to that – Cannes offers a bewildering variety of experience, in and out of the cinema

By Isabel Stevens

At this, my first Cannes, what struck me was how the extremes of cinema breezily commingle. In the underground maze of the Marché, films such as *Make Me Shudder 2* are bidding for attention alongside the prestigious competition entries at the Lumière theatre. There are advertisements for Hollywood spectacles emblazoned on the posh hotel façades on the Croisette, their scenes of mayhem playing over the heads of espresso-sipping guests. Looming over this pleasure ground of glamour, commerce and art, like Dr. T.J. Eckleburg in Gatsby-land, was a gold-tinged hoarding of Marcello Mastroianni from Fellini's *8 1/2*, although he seemed more the approving patron saint with sunglasses than a judging God with spectacles.

Perhaps naively, I like to think that art ruled the lavish seaside pageant, even in a year without much arthouse controversy (no three-hour lesbian drama, no Danish motormouth). Some regulars complained that it wasn't a vintage year, but even though I missed one of the most talked-up unknowns (Critics' Week winner *The Tribe*) there were films that heralded directors to watch out for:

MY CANNES TOP TEN

1. **Timbuktu** Abderrahmane Sissako
2. **National Gallery** Frederick Wiseman
3. **Goodbye to Language** (below)
Jean-Luc Godard
4. **Jauja** Lisandro Alonso
5. **Two Days, One Night** Dardenne brothers
6. **Bird People** Pascale Ferran
7. **Amour Fou** Jessica Hausner
8. **Mr. Turner** Mike Leigh
9. **Winter Sleep** Nuri Bilge Ceylan
10. **The Kindergarten Teacher** Nadav Lapid



Jean-Charles Hue's **Eat Your Bones**, a lawless road trip in command of boundless energy and realism, despite some narrative wrinkles; Nadav Lapid's **The Kindergarten Teacher**, an unusual tale of obsession centred on a precocious five-year-old boy. A Hollywood remake of Korean director Kim Seong-hun's second feature **A Hard Day** – a thriller about amoral cops – will surely surface soon.

At its best, this Cannes recognised both masters serving up choice work and lesser-known filmmakers experimenting full-throttle. Let's start with the former. In **Two Days, One Night**, the Dardenne brothers present another single-POV moral dilemma, following Sandra (Marion Cotillard) through her personal battle with depression and her weekend-long fight to convince her 16 co-workers to give up their €1,000 bonuses and vote to keep her in her job. Cotillard's understated performance captures completely her character's fluctuating mental state, insecure one moment, composed the next. The filmmakers never resort to pity or easy vilification – indeed it is remarkable how, from just a brief peek through a doorway, the Dardennes repeatedly sketch the characters and lives of Sandra's colleagues so resolutely and sympathetically.

Within the competition, the antithesis of this refined slice of social realism was Jean-Luc Godard's retina-invigorating ciné-poem **Goodbye to Language**. "I hate characters," pronounces one actor, in a film that interweaves musical, historical, philosophical and film

quotations with oblique stories about a couple, a murder and most prominently, a wandering dog. With its aphoristic conversations, toilet gags, musings on Rodin's *Thinker* and phosphorescent explorations of nature, it was the densest but also the most cinema-bending film on the Riviera, one which made the entire audience squint, blink and panic in unison, when Godard deconstructs the 3D plane so that the two images separate and twirl round each other before reassembling. If there was one film at the festival that demanded an immediate repeat viewing, it was this.

Outside the Competition, the Directors' Fortnight sidebar showcased two veterans making forms of cinema – animation and documentary – rarely admitted into the Palais. Frederick Wiseman's **National Gallery** is not only an engrossing behind-the-scenes tour of the National Gallery in London, but also a forensic essay on the art of visual storytelling. Intricately structured, edited over 14 months, it explores elitism as well as painting's relationship to cinema, and illuminates how far Wiseman's methods are from simple observation.

Meanwhile, the swansong of Studio Ghibli co-founder Takahata Isao, **The Tale of the Princess Kaguya** (his first film in 14 years), bore many of his trademarks but alas not all of them. From the director who animates weighty subjects such as war (in *Grave of the Fireflies*) and memory and introspection (in *Only Yesterday*), here was a fantasy about an otherworldly princess sprouting from a bamboo stem, free and happy in the natural world, stifled in high society. This adaptation of a Japanese folk tale demonstrated its creator's meticulous attention to both verisimilitude and invention (observe the many different ways he draws eyes), but the characters were less surprising and three-dimensional than is usual for Takahata. The delicate, impressionistic animation was mesmerising, disintegrating into a sublime flurry of charcoal whenever the princess breaks out of her Tokyo confines, but the film offered only occasional



Jessica Hausner's *Amour fou*

moments of swelling melancholy rather than Takahata's usual emotional deluge.

A common theme was girl protagonists with an urge to escape, particularly in films directed by women – from the Parisian teenager fighting herself out of a dead end in Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood* to the reality TV contest dreamer of Alice Rohrwacher's **The Wonders** (*Le Meraviglie*). This was a tender coming-of-age tale about the eldest daughter of a bee-keeping family living on the margins of Italian society. Immersed in the minutiae of honey production, and coaxing nuanced performances from her young actors, Rohrwacher creates an intimate portrait, alive to its young characters' feelings, and with some interesting elliptical touches. It was a shame that the adults, especially the family's domineering father, were not realised so deeply.

I found more adventurous female visions in *Un Certain Regard*, particularly Jessica Hausner's period drama **Amour fou**. Based on a real-life suicide pact in 19th-century Prussia, the film mixes melancholy, absurdity and humour exquisitely, as it follows the life-weary poet

Jean-Luc Godard's 'Goodbye to Language' was the densest but also the most cinema-bending film on the Riviera



Pascale Ferran's *Bird People*

Heinrich von Kleist's public quest for a death mistress (his chat-up line: "I'm not looking for a partner in life, but a partner in death"). As he courts Henrietta, the supposedly terminally ill wife of a high-ranking government official, the film mimics his thanatophilic attitude, warding off melodrama and sentimentality with chilly performances, a great supporting cast of dogs and archly stylised production design and cinematography. The whole film resembles a Vermeer-conceived doll's house, but even amid the endless ornate tableaux Hausner never loses sight of Henrietta's lonely, sad predicament.

Another female filmmaker delivering nutty romances was Pascale Ferran. **Bird People** starts as a been-there-before tale about two unconnected lives (chambermaid, businessman) passing one another in a Parisian airport hotel, but explodes into something altogether unexpected halfway through, when a supernatural change of perspective occurs. The contrast between the two acts is enormous: the first is characterised by a mundane fidelity to the character's respective worlds – cleaning rooms, attending board meetings; the second by a gleeful, heady, airborne renunciation of those worlds, one that peers (through innovative use of drone photography) into people's lives like the angels in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*, though more playfully.

Aside from *Goodbye to Language*, Cannes' least categorisable experience – as opposed to mere film – was Lisandro Alonso's **Jauja**. This is the Argentine filmmaker's first foray into costume drama, and employs Viggo Mortensen's star-power; but Alonso's austere style shows no signs of softening. In fact this John Ford-esque western, set in 19th-century Patagonia, is far stranger than anything he's produced before. Captain Dinesen (Mortensen), a Danish soldier-engineer, is a wandering soul, searching at first for a utopia (Jauja, the film explains at the start, is a mythical paradise) and then for his daughter, who has run off with a trooper. Alonso painstakingly plots Dinesen's journey, riding in and out of the frame in real time as the landscape gradually changes from lush grasslands to a craggy void (beautifully shot in Academy ratio). As he ventures deeper into the wilderness, Alonso's slow cinema ventures down the rabbit hole, his *Heart of Darkness* fable turning into a Lynchian riddle. *Un Certain Regard* was a patchy affair, but adventures such as this made you wish the Competition selection would take more risks. ⑨



The Dardenne brothers' *Two Days, One Night*

PORTRAIT



MODEL BEHAVIOUR
Gugu Mbatha-Raw as Dido Belle and Sarah Gadon as Lady Elizabeth Murray in *Belle*, Amma Asante's investigation of the life and complex social status of a mixed-race aristocrat in 18th-century England

OF A LADY



Amma Asante's 'Belle' presents a fictionalised account of the true tale of a mixed-race aristocrat in 18th-century England, a delicate portrait of the complexities of race and racism that strives to show that nothing in life is ever simply black and white

By Ashley Clark

Streatham-raised Amma Asante's second feature, *Belle*, sheds light on an intriguing, little-known slice of British history. Set toward the end of the 18th century, at the cusp of the start of the abolition process, it's the fictionalised account of the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the mixed-race daughter of British naval officer Sir John Lindsay and an unknown African woman. At the beginning of the film, Lindsay (Matthew Goode) arrives at London's Kenwood House estate to bravely entrust the care of young Dido (Lauren Julien-Box) to his uncle Lord Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson) – the highest judge in the land – and his loving wife Lady Mansfield (Emily Watson). Despite their initial shock upon seeing Dido's skin colour, they welcome her in to the fold, and look after her as their own.

Yet matters are far from straightforward, as we discover when the focus switches to the grown-up Dido (Gugu Mbatha-Raw). She finds herself too low in status, because of her skin colour, to dine with her ostensibly sympathetic family but, paradoxically, too high in rank to dine with the servants. In a further twist, Dido's wealth – an inheritance that arrives with news of the death of her father – causes her to be viewed as a desirable partner for the son of vulture-like Lady Ashford (Miranda Richardson), who is happy to put her racism to one side for the promise of a tidy income. Proceedings are further complicated when Dido becomes aware of Lord Mansfield's crucial involvement in the ruling on the Zong ship massacre, a real case concerned with the deaths of some 140 African slaves. Alongside idealistic young lawyer and putative love interest John Davinier (Sam Reid), Dido becomes an activist for change and, in the process, very possibly British cinema's first authentic mixed-race heroine (Mbatha-Raw is herself of English and South African parentage). For this mixed-race British writer, that's a big deal.

Asante handles *Belle's* complex themes (oppression along the lines of race, class, gender) and generic elements (a gossamer blend of Austen-esque romance, character study and legal potboiler) with such sleek authority that it comes as a surprise to learn she hasn't always had her eye on the director's chair. "I had no conception of it as something that I could ever go into, and therefore it wasn't even a consideration," she explains. "As a teenage actress [in a regular role in the BBC's *Grange Hill* in the 1980s], everybody bar one who directed me was white, male and in their forties. It's just how it was. It never crossed my mind. When I was on TV all those years ago, there weren't that many black people



on screen either. Even *Desmond's* wasn't on at that point, so we hadn't had the all-black sitcom."

Buzzing with creative energy, but ultimately lukewarm on acting ("I wasn't a good actress. At all."), Asante turned to screenwriting. One key reason for this was the authority she could gain from wielding the pen. "With writing, if I wanted to take a blank page and start telling my story, I could. I wanted to tell stories through my eyes – my lens – as opposed to people telling me my story." One of her initial efforts was picked up for development by Channel 4, and eventually commissioned via the production company Chrysalis, which also mentored her – an experience she credits as very important to her progress. Though the series never came to fruition, Asante soon went on to write and produce a TV show: *Brothers and Sisters*, a drama that ran on BBC Two for two series in 1998. Following this, Asante began work on the script for *A Way of Life*, which would become her first feature.

Yet Asante initially resisted overtures from the UK Film Council, which was developing the project, to direct. "I was like, 'No. No way. I love this script. I've really worked hard on it. I'm going to produce it like I produced the TV series, and I'm not going to ruin it!'" Was it a matter of confidence? "I imagined this clunky filmmaking evolving from what I thought was my best piece of work up to that point. And why would I do this to myself? The UKFC said, 'We're going to send you to film school for a month. And then we want you to shoot a pilot. It's for you to work out your weaknesses.' It's incredible that I had that support."

A Way of Life, released in 2004, was a powerful yet lyrical social-realist drama set in Wales, about a 17-year-old single mother Leigh-Anne (Stephanie James), and her involvement in a racially aggravated killing. It was critically lauded, and Asante picked up a Carl Foreman award for special achievement at the Baftas. On the face of it, *A Way of Life* and *Belle* are vastly different pictures, but they both feature a complex female central character, a rarity in British cinema. Asante is also quick to draw parallels between the films as studies of the relationship between the individual and the society that surrounds them: "In *Belle*, does Dido feel like a lady? Or does she feel like the child of a slave? Does society accept her as a lady or do they see her as the child of a slave? With Leigh-Anne in *A Way of Life*, she defined herself as a mother. Society said, 'You're not', and it led her to kill. The most dangerous thing in life is feeling like you have no control over your identity." Asante defines the key themes that run through her work as "race, status, class and gender", adding: "With *A Way of Life* I wanted to show that you could tell a story about race without having a black person in it; to say, 'This is how it connects us.' You might think it's just my problem, but actually this is why it's your problem too."

Despite *A Way of Life's* success, things didn't quite pan for out Asante in its aftermath. She spent a year-and-a-half researching a 1940s Berlin-set story called *Where Hands Touch*, which reached the stage of being announced at Cannes. At the same time, she'd begun work on an honour-killing-themed thriller for Focus Features, and a Jane Austen adaptation, *Lady Susan*, for New Line Cinema. Unfortunately, just as the banking crisis struck, all three projects folded within about two months. A disheartened Asante retreated into her shell until a fateful

As black people we understand the concept of subtle racism, racism that runs deep under the surface. And it's one of the hardest things to communicate in film

visit to a museum provided her with fresh inspiration. "My husband took me to a portrait exhibition ['Black is beautiful: Rubens to Dumas'] in Amsterdam, where we live. It was one of the best things I ever did," she says. "It looked at the black characters in European art from about the 14th century onwards, and how we went from the status of pets and background characters to highlight the status of the main protagonist in the painting, right through to muse."

By sheer coincidence, shortly after seeing the exhibition, Asante received a postcard from the British producer Damian Jones (*Adulthood*, *The Iron Lady*), along with a note begging her to work on a corresponding idea. The postcard featured a reproduction of an extraordinary image: a painting of Dido and her white cousin Elizabeth, dated from 1779. (The actual portrait was moved from Kenwood House to Scone Palace in Perth, Scotland, some years later.) "I knew immediately why it was important. There are many interpretations of that painting, but absolutely, in terms of art history, Dido is the superior person in that painting. In that tiny millimetre where she's up higher than Elizabeth, she's slightly superior."

In 1804, Belle died in her early 40s, of unknown causes. There is no grave to commemorate her life and for many years she was forgotten. It was only in the 1970s and 80s that researchers began to look in to her life, but even so, details remain scant. As a result the filmmakers had a broad artistic licence to develop the story and turn it into something with concrete contemporary significance. Misan Sagay's screenplay makes a feminist heroine of Dido; she's a strong-willed woman whose quest for agency and self-determination resonates in the here and now. "I didn't want to present a weak woman of colour on screen," says Asante. "As women we are strong, and we all have our different challenges depending on our history and background and where we come from. Black women sometimes have to have different strengths. I wanted to present that stuff up on screen. It was important to me that she was strong."

Dido indeed ends the film in control of her destiny, but the most emotionally affecting thread in *Belle* is directly related to the painting, and concerns our protagonist's relationship with her own image. Early in the film, Dido

TRUMP CARD
When director Amma Asante was sent a postcard of a 1779 painting of Dido Belle and her cousin Elizabeth (below) by producer Damian Jones, she was immediately intrigued to find out more





is frequently seen staring at the giant paintings hanging at Kenwood – they feature her illustrious white ancestors front and centre, and are typically depicted with a slave gazing up at them adoringly (Asante’s camera drifts deliberately toward these marginal figures, emphasising Dido’s subjective, curious point of view). Later, Dido – upon seeing a racist tavern sign – makes the point explicit, lamenting: “Just as in life, we are no better than in paintings.” This subtly repressive, pervasively negative representation, combined with the implicit and explicit racism she faces, leads Dido to be terrified upon learning that she is to be the subject of a painting. Of course, the portrait comes out fine, and Dido – who has previously self-harmed as she stares tearfully into a mirror – is now able to majestically regard her own image.

The delicate manner in which *Belle* uses its status as a mainstream film as a forum to contest issues of race and representation put me in mind of the black British theoretician Stuart Hall, who sadly died earlier this year. (Of Hall, Asante says: “It’s the subtleties of a person like that existing. It’s about the people he’s empowered to speak about history in a manner that’s creative and artistic. That spoke to me. He was like an uncle who just knows everything, who gives you self-esteem just by their existence.”)

I mention how impressed I am by the subtle way that *Belle* illuminates the distinctly non-binary complexities of racism, and Asante responds: “What all people – but particularly white people – understand, is the concept of straightforward racism. What we as black people understand is the concept of subtle racism, unintentional racism, racism that runs deep, deep, deep under the surface. And it’s one of the hardest things to communicate

in film – especially one in this kind of genre, which is a love story... a very commercial movie. The family think they’re doing nothing wrong. ‘We love you! You’re eating good food, better than the servants! And you can eat with us most of the time! And you can play the piano!’ There are many white women of that period who would have been happy to have been in those circumstances and would have simply said, ‘This is a good life.’” Asante cracks a smile, keenly aware of the peculiarly British quirks of the social landscape her film portrays.

Though I’m slightly wary, I’m keen to hear Asante’s thoughts on the fact that she’s only the second black British woman to have directed a feature that’s been given a UK cinema release, after Ngozi Onwurah for *Welcome II the Terrordome*. Although Debbie Tucker Green’s *Second Coming* and Destiny Ekaragha’s *Gone too Far* are also likely to be released later this year, this is a depressing statistic that reflects poorly on the British film industry. It’s not something, however, that Asante wants to think too deeply about – the burden of representation can be a severely limiting factor to one’s artistry. We briefly discuss the work of fellow Amsterdam resident Steve McQueen, who clearly feels under no pressure to solely make ‘black’ stories. Asante then picks up the thread, to emphatically conclude: “If I think about a tiny minority I’m in, it becomes too daunting, so my tactic has been to not think about it too much. When I’m sitting at a desk and I’m telling a story and there’s a female – or a black female – at the centre of it, I feel really empowered. Make no mistake: the more we’re able to tell our stories, the more it gives licence to other people to tell our stories.”



***Belle* is released in the UK on 13 June and is reviewed on page 70**

BELLE OF THE BALL
(Clockwise from top left) Matthew Goode’s Captain Lindsay delivers young Belle (Lauren Julien-Box) to Kenwood House; Lord Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson); Amma Asante on set with Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Sarah Gadon at the piano; Belle with her love interest John Davinier (Sam Reid)

ANGELS AND DEVILS: THE DARK DREAMS OF DENNIS POTTER

Britain's pre-eminent television dramatist produced a body of work unmatched for the range of its polemical concerns. Pioneering the use of experimental techniques designed to shake viewers from their passive slumber on the sofa, his barbed, darkly comic work laid bare his own demons as he sought to shine a light on the nation's spiritual longings, sexual anxiety and political malaise

By Graham Fuller

'What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself' Mark Twain

Twenty years after Dennis Potter's death, he remains the sole visionary to have devoted his career to writing drama for British television. This is not to underestimate the vital contributions of such TV playwrights as Elaine Morgan, Troy Kennedy Martin, David Mercer, Jim Allen, Jack Rosenthal, Alan Bennett and Alan Bleasdale. Potter alone, however, consistently dramatised the common need for spiritual deliverance or psychological release. The familiar terrain for his trenchant sociopolitical criticism was a secular England in thrall to soul-crushing patriarchy, commercialism and religious dogma.

Frequently drawing on his life, Potter assembled an intricate mosaic of thematically connected small-screen dramas: 29 single plays – one adapted from his only stage play, one from a Hardy short story – seven original series and four adapted series. In the realm of television authorship, it's a corpus unmatched for the density of its inter-relatedness and the range of its polemical concerns. Over a span of 30 years, Potter's dramas waged a Blakeian war against materialism and commodification and evoked the displacement of religion by popular culture. They illuminated the ubiquitous interplay of fantasy, memory and perceived reality, and the conflict between spirituality and lust. They explicated negative sexual attitudes and were inscribed with Potter's political disillusion and Britain's decline. (Of his nine movies, five derived from his plays and one from the second of his three original novels; only 1985's *Dreamchild* and 1987's *Track 29* share the conviction of his television writing.)

Potter's plays consistently examine the experience of watching television, the medium he favoured because it offered the dream of a common culture. Although he warily praised Kennedy Martin's 1964 *Encore* magazine article 'Nats Go Home', a manifesto calling for a new visual language in television drama, Potter would

become the foremost proponent of non-naturalism, which he believed could shatter the illusory reality foisted on viewers by the conventional narratives of most television fiction. He sought to make viewers think by alerting them to televisual artifice, thereby disrupting their passive spectatorship.

The conditions under which Potter was able to subvert British television's diet of panaceas began to vanish with the emergence in the 1980s of all-film drama. This put paid to the halcyon two decades in which, as Potter wrote, "Writers, not directors, are the kings of electronic drama." However, *Pennies from Heaven* (1978) and *The Singing Detective* (1986) – his first two serials with lipsynched songs – bred the US musical police drama series *Cop Rock* (1990) and the BBC's musical thriller *Blackpool* (2004), and were honoured by Alain Resnais's film *Same Old Song* (1997). Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960) influenced Matthew Weiner's *Mad Men* (2007-), but its implicit correlation between advertising's ruthless hawking of empty utopias and the destructive sexual treacheries of its main protagonist Don Draper, a long-dead Depression prostitute's son who yearns for spiritual peace, is nothing if not Potteresque. So, too, are the hit cable show's flashbacks, dreams, fantastical detours from the quotidian, and its disinterring of dirty secrets.

Potter's seminal TV work also has an affinity with the time-fracturing cinema of Nicolas Roeg – director of *Track 29*, Potter's rethink of his play *Schmoedipus* (1974) – and that of David Lynch and David Cronenberg, fellow generators of psychic and sexual unease. The current dominance of television by glib costume serials selling British heritage, nostalgia, novelettish romance, and sex uncomplicated by neuroses, meanwhile, indicates why Potter – scourge of commodification and cultural bromides – is relevant now more than ever.



The first part of the 'Messages for Posterity: The Complete Dennis Potter' season screens at BFI Southbank, London, throughout June and July. Part two follows in summer 2015





FINDING HIS RELIGION

Potter was born in 1935 in Berry Hill, a Gloucestershire mining village in the Forest of Dean, which would become the lost Eden of *A Beast with Two Backs* (1968), *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979), *The Singing Detective* and *Cold Lazarus* (1996). As a child, he worshipped at the nonconformist Salem chapel, two or three times every Sunday, learning (and learning to write from) the hymns in Ira D. Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos*. Although the adult Potter was an agnostic, his writing was shaped by his early exposure to a fundamentalist form of Methodism.

Potter recognised that faith is a universal need, but that to believe in a mystical deity, particularly the Old Testament God, was to buy a bill of anti-humanitarian goods. In *Son of Man* (1969), Potter's secular version of the Gospels, his Jesus is an earthy socialist rebel who, preaching "Love your enemy", wanders from a Forest of Dean-inspired Galilee into a Judea steeped in Machiavellian intrigue. His bullshitness and self-doubt sprang from Potter, who completed the play when in personal need of reassurance that "everything will be all right" during one of his periodic hospitalisations.

That theme was echoed in *Joe's Ark* (1974), which presents to a widowed Welshman, whose 18-year-old daughter Lucy is dying of cancer in her room above his pet shop, the brutal possibility that there's no heaven for her or anyone else. After hearing his chapel preacher rationalise God's need to expunge all animals and mankind – save Noah, "the one just man" – Joe renounces the Bible. Although he still talks to Jesus out of habit and desperation, he turns his back on the God who is "calling" Lucy at such a tender age. He tells the preacher he would not do to the animals dependent on him for survival what God is doing to Lucy, who cannot possibly warrant the fate of the corrupted creatures on whom God unleashed the Flood.

Lucy refuses to comfort a visiting student friend, John, who insensitively proclaims his love for her. She regards with scepticism



KEEPING THE FAITH
Although Potter was an agnostic, many of his dramas addressed questions of faith influenced by his early exposure to Methodism – such as (from top) *Son of Man* (1969), *Where Adam Stood* (1976), *Angels Are So Few* (1970) and *Schmoedipus* (1974)

the doctor who tries to reassure her she'll die in peace. Though self-serving, the outsider John is the agent of Joe's reconciliation with his prodigal son, the vulgar nightclub comedian Bobby. He turns up seconds after Lucy's death to learn that she had sent him her love and told Joe she was "going home" to be with her mother. It's not disclosed if Lucy died as serenely as she had hoped or feigned serenity to console her father, or if Joe had made up her last words to console Bobby. Whether Joe's belief in God has been restored, both men's need to find meaning in Lucy's premature death springs from a faith deeper than that offered by religion.

In *Where Adam Stood* (1976), set in 1857, the fundamentalist preacher and marine biologist Philip Gosse informs his coughing son Edmund he will soon join his recently dead mother in heaven, causing him nightmares. Instead of dying, Edmund takes a stand against his father's stifling dogmatism by insisting that God, hearing the boy's prayer, has permitted his purchase of a toy ship. Edmund follows this act of self-assertion by preventing Philip from entering his room, anticipating his eventual rejection of the Scriptures "to fashion his inner life for himself", as he put it in his 1907 autobiography *Father and Son*, on which the play is loosely based. The isolating of Philip augurs, too, the intellectual community's rejection of Philip's book *Omphalos*, with which he attempted to reconcile his belief in creationism with embryonic Darwinism. Edmund's defeat of his father echoes his resistance of an insane woman's sexual assault, symbolising incest, that preserves him from Oedipal trauma and the kind of psychosexual problems that plague *The Singing Detective's* Philip Marlow and other Potter protagonists.

Potter recognised that the outward trappings of faith are manifested by humans regardless of whether they believe in God. The Depression-era pop songs that give their name (as much as the title number) to *Pennies from Heaven* are, Potter said, "Our diminished nod-



DEVIL MAY CARE
Michael Kitchen as Martin
and Michelle Newell as Pattie
in Dennis Potter's TV drama
Brimstone and Treacle (1976),
which was banned famously
by the BBC

*Potter recognised that faith
is a universal need, but that
to believe in a mystical deity,
particularly the Old Testament
God, was to buy a bill of
anti-humanitarian goods*

back to the Psalms." They provide epiphanies for the self-deluding song-sheet salesman Arthur Parker and others who take spiritual sustenance from their silver-lining optimism. But they cannot rescue him any more than an old woman's beatific memories of a chapel banner – showing an angel protecting an imperilled child from a symbolic fall into sin – can prevent the heart-attack death of her husband when they entertain a long-haired wanderer, Michael Biddle, who claims, in *Angels Are So Few* (1970), to be celestial.

Like the interloping John in *Joe's Ark*, Michael is, in Potter's words, "the stranger outside the house who's really inside your head" – as is Martin in *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976) and the returned son Glen in *Schmoedipus*. To revitalise the clichéd figures of the angel and the demon and draw the audience's attention to them, Potter reversed their traditional functions as agents of change: the angel Michael regresses into a whimpering child; the demonic Martin purges living death from a young woman.

Angels intertwines Michael's reality with that of the suburban housewife Cynthia. Michael has created an identity for himself as a sexless angel to bury the trauma he suffered as a sex-abuse victim. Married to a censorious bore, the sexually frustrated Cynthia conjures up Michael as a man to take to bed. When she seduces him, he relives his childhood trauma, which appears to restore his sanity. Cynthia anticipates obeying her husband's dictum that she pull herself together but has become aware of her need to rebel. God – but not the chapel God – has shown his face.

In the famously banned *Brimstone*, Martin is summoned into existence by the parents of the catatonic Pattie, whose condition resulted from her being struck down by a car after she'd witnessed her father have sex with her friend. Martin rapes Pattie back into consciousness. The devout mother believes her prayers have been answered with a miracle; the faithless father must face his daughter's wrath.

THE NON-NATURALIST

Potter had studied television drama as the *Daily Herald's* TV critic (1962-64). He was drawn to non-naturalist techniques, initially developed by dramatists like Strindberg and Pirandello, to facilitate the visual dramatisation of subjective reality – the non-linear flow of present-tense thoughts, fantasies, reveries and memories produced by feelings – which has the potential to subvert naturalism's prescriptive reality.

To a similar end, Potter introduced his most celebrated non-naturalistic technique in *Pennies from Heaven*: the lipsynching of “cheap songs”, which, charged with the characters' emotions (or euphemising them), penetrates the illusion of reality in a way that the songs seamlessly interwoven into traditional musicals no longer can.

Non-naturalism arrived at the BBC in the early 60s, when the producer James MacTaggart agreed to the use of post-Brechtian ‘alienation’ techniques – characters who directly address the audience, the acknowledgment of studio artifice and technology – in the drama series *Storyboard*, *Studio 4* and *Teletale*, the last two story-edited by Roger Smith. When MacTaggart launched *The Wednesday Play* series in 1964, Smith hired Potter's future producer Kenith Trodd as a story editor and invited Potter to adapt a prose story he was writing into *The Confidence Course* (1965). Its videotape long since wiped, Potter's first produced play was an anti-capitalist allegory that denounces three conmen trying to enrol gullible people on a self-motivation course. Potter used two non-naturalistic devices: a sardonic narrator, and a disruptive interloper who purports to be the scabrous Georgian essayist William Hazlitt and anticipates the fractious imaginary visitors in his ‘Angel’ plays. (Potter's riskiest narration would be the one he voiced directly for 1989's *Blackeyes*, its self-consciously lovelorn lilt and furtive lasciviousness intended to contradict the serial's feminist empathy.)

Potter used direct address in *Stand Up, Nigel*

Barton and *Vote, Vote, Vote, for Nigel Barton* (both 1965), and a narrator in the latter. When the adult Nigel recalls a childhood conversation with his primary-school teacher, he appears as an adult in boy's clothing in his old classroom. In *Blue Remembered Hills*, adult actors were cast as the seven children to emphasise their mannerisms and to indicate that their characters, and therefore their destinies, have already been set in stone. Grieving for his cuckolded father, long-dead, *The Singing Detective's* Marlow, a middle-aged Job in hospital pyjamas, time-travels backwards 40 years to visit him at a Forest of Dean working-men's club.

Long before the term ‘meta-movie’ became commonplace, Potter was pushing meta-television to its limits. The sexually paranoid actor Jack Black in *Follow the Yellow Brick Road* (1972) believes he is being followed by the same studio camera that recorded the play. The casting of Kika Markham as both an actress and an escort in the parallel strands of *Double Dare* (1976) calls into question which, if either of them, is ‘real’. The blocked television dramatist who meets the actress in a hotel bar conceives, as he talks to her, a play in which the escort is raped and murdered by a client, yet only the actress dies. She is strangled by the dramatist, who has allowed his misogynistic fantasies to swamp his reality.

Significantly, Casanova, Christopher Hudson in *Only Make Believe* (1973), Marlow, Jessica Kingsley in *Blackeyes* (1989) and Daniel Feeld in *Karaoke* (1996) try to regain control of their lives through writing (the script of *Angels Are So Few* in the case of *Only Make Believe*) or capturing escaped characters. Daniel, the first speaker in Potter's meta-novel *Hide and Seek* (1972), is a character who seeks to escape the author, a malign god in Potter's image; the second speaker is the author, who merges with Daniel as he seeks redemption for his sins. Like *Double Dare*, the novel is a palimpsest.



The lipsynching of ‘cheap songs’ charged with the characters’ emotions penetrates the illusion of reality in a way that songs interwoven into traditional musicals no longer can

SUBVERTING REALITY
In dramas such as (clockwise from top) *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) and *Only Make Believe* (1973), Potter experimented with alienation techniques and meta fiction



THE CURSE OF DESIRE

Potter was ten when his coal-miner father temporarily moved his family from Gloucestershire to Hammersmith. He was molested there by an uncle, the 'fall' succeeding the exile. At 26, he suffered the first symptoms of the crippling skin disease psoriatic arthropathy, possibly a delayed response to the trauma of abuse, which led to periods of reclusiveness. Images, memories or aftermaths of abuse and/or rape occur in *Moonlight on the Highway* (1969), *Angels Are So Few*, *Schmoedipus*, *Double Dare* and *Blackeyes*; there's an unseen sex murder in *Pennies* and a near sex assault in *Where Adam Stood*. The shock of witnessing parental adultery has cataclysmic outcomes in *Brimstone and Treacle* and *The Singing Detective*. Catharsis for the victims comes when they confront (if they can) the return of the repressed, confess or relieve their traumas and maladaptive behaviours, or undergo psychotherapy.

Male desire in Potter's plays is habitually a curse. Casanova is a prisoner of his flesh, as Marlow is a prisoner of his psychosomatically diseased skin. Seeing his mother have sex with his father's friend when he was nine engendered Philip's sexual disgust – encapsulated in his pulp novel's lurid description of intercourse. Marlow's paranoid sexual fantasies about his wife and his offscreen insulting of a prostitute stem from that same primal wound. Similarly, the Cold War agent Daniel Young's vicious post-coital putdown of Christabel Cavendish in *Blade on the Feather* (1980) is due, apparently, to the murder of his father on the orders of hers.

Potter was criticised for representing women as angels and whores. He was demonstrating the common male response to unresolved Oedipal fears prompted by

the boy's realisation that his 'pure' mother is a sexual being. Some of his male characters are so fearful of uncontrollable female sexuality that they vilify desirable women as "slags" and "sluts". Arthur in *Pennies*, Marlow, *Follow the Yellow Brick Road*'s Jack Black, and Private Francis in *Lipstick on Your Collar* (1993) rhapsodise over the apparent purity of Eileen, Nurse Mills, Veronica and Sylvia, respectively, as variations on "the girl in all those songs", a reductive vision of prelapsarian innocence, but carnal need underpins this idealisation. Nurse Mills becomes a sultry *chanteuse* in one of Marlow's hallucinations. Eileen's transformation from virgin to prostitute elicits the weaker Arthur's sexual paranoia, but sex has liberated her from drudging for her father and coarse brothers. The wives in *Angels Are So Few*, *Only Make Believe*, *Rain on the Roof* (1980), and *Cream in My Coffee* (1980) also have real or imagined sex with strangers. Unlike their repressed or neglectful husbands, they have arrived at the point of self-liberation.

Allegations of misogyny against Potter prompted his disquieting analysis of the exploitation of women in *Blackeyes*. Former fashion model Jessica Kingsley tries to wrest back her life from its novelisation by her Uncle Maurice, who had molested her when she was a child. The novel's eponymous protagonist is a pliant, emotionally stunted woman – more symbol than character – entrapped by male lust. Jessica gets her revenge at a cost. As *Blackeyes* travels through the drama's nested narratives, she attempts to escape three male authors, one of them Potter himself. She disappears at the end, but it's doubtful she will permanently avoid the male gaze.



SINS OF THE FLESH
Potter's treatment of sex and desire – as when the young Philip Marlow spies his mother's alfresco coupling in 1986's *The Singing Detective* (above) – often has traumatic associations, and images of rape and abuse were common, from 1969's *Moonlight on the Highway* (below left) to 1989's *Blackeyes* (below right)

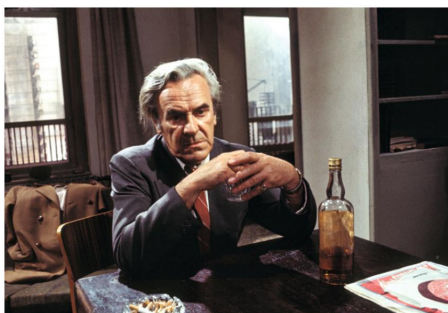


OF CLASS AND COUNTRY

Potter addressed Britain's political decay as a TV playwright, journalist and outspoken public figure. His first book, *The Glittering Coffin* (1960), described the encroachment of 'admass' society (its affluence founded on mass-media advertising) on the working-class Forest of Dean as a microcosm of change in Conservative Britain.

Most of Potter's plays dealing directly with British politics and the class system were made during his first six years as a television dramatist. In the 1964 general election, he stood unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate for the Conservative stronghold of Hertfordshire East. He was demoralised by having to sell an uncontentious image rather than argue issues from a principled socialist standpoint. He translated the demoralising experience into *Vote, Vote, Vote, for Nigel Barton*, which targets inherent lying in the party political system. It begins with mock-documentary footage satirising the hunting set's callous reaction to the death of a Tory MP thrown from his horse. In the resulting by-election, Labour candidate Nigel disgusts himself by glibly canvassing working-class racists and the senile and infirm, including an amputee who reminds him of his enfeebled miner father. He is accompanied by his agent, an ultra-cynical realist who, in his asides to the camera, sneers at Nigel's wish that he could bring "passion", "compassion", and "conviction" to his campaign.

Nigel restores his dignity by attacking the platitudes of the Tory candidate concerning the likely replacement of the welfare state by an "opportunity state". His sardonic invitation to the play's audience to write to their MPs if they object to "this documentary" caused the BBC to pull the play on the day of its broadcast in June 1965, lest it offended both the Labour and Conservative parties.



It aired on 15 December, a week after *Stand Up, Nigel Barton*, a non-linear play that intercuts between Nigel's memories of his days as a gifted schoolboy, of his experiences as a working-class star amid children of privilege at Oxford, and the broadcasting of his docudrama about the mining village in which he was raised. It enabled Potter to probe his experience of being tugged by two classes and the anxiety he felt about betraying his parents and his village community in *Between Two Rivers*, his 1960 BBC documentary, and in a 1958 radio interview.

Despite the objections of BBC brass, Potter was able to get away with *Message for Posterity* (1967), a mostly naturalistic allegory about the ease with which the establishment can crush a dissident artist. Occasioned by the suppression of Graham Sutherland's 1954 portrait of Winston Churchill, the play depicts an ageing radical artist's God-like decision to destroy, in paint, the reputation of the fictional Sir David Browning, who had led Britain during the war. The artist eventually resorts to anarchy and is sent to an asylum. Potter snipes at Churchill as a class warrior, but refrains from demolishing him. The play was wiped but remade in 1994.

Potter was on firmer territory with the Cold War dramas *Traitor* (1971) and

Blade on the Feather. Each is a melancholy rumination on the class system, filtered through the calling to account of a former English intelligence controller who had served the Soviets as a spymaster and engineered at least one assassination.

The claustrophobic chamber drama *Traitor* was inspired by an interview Kim Philby gave the *Sunday Times* in 1967. Interrogated by journalists in his Moscow flat, the alcoholic Adrian Harris (John Le Mesurier) sifts through his memories of being humiliated and struck by a teacher at public school – the image juxtaposed with footage of police brutality against the Jarrow marchers – and of his subservience to his landed Arthurian archaeologist father, whose contempt for the working class begat Adrian's conversion to communism. Though full of doubt, he believes he betrayed not his country but his class, yearning as he did for a spiritually renewed, classless Britain – a Camelot as mythical as the shining cities yearned for by other Potter protagonists. It transpires that he was bugged by the KGB and fantasised his confession, inventing the visiting journalists in order to relieve his guilt and despair.

Jason Cavendish (Donald Pleasence), the traitor in *Blade on the Feather*, is an elderly Cambridge don dwelling in a big country house with his second wife, his daughter, and his butler, a fellow Old Etonian and KGB operative. Daniel Young, the angel of death who visits him, appears to be an MI5 hitman, but identities and allegiances in the play, a bitter *Le Carré* spoof, are fluid. Cavendish's treachery was born not from communist idealism but his regret that the pre-war class hierarchy has dissolved into a social democracy. "I was born into a class that loves what it owns. And we don't own quite enough of it anymore," he tells Daniel.

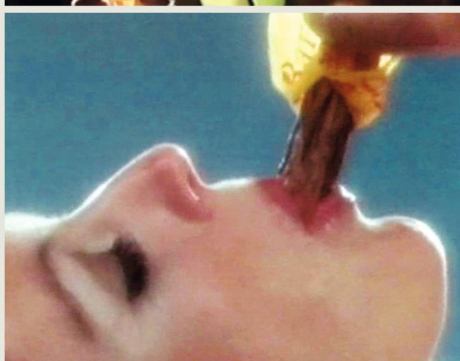
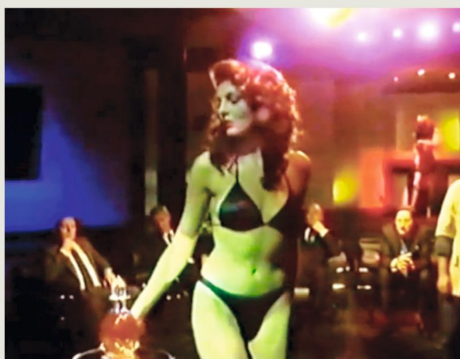
Standing for parliament in 1964, Potter was demoralised by having to sell an uncontentious image rather than argue from a principled socialist standpoint

A CLASS ACT
Potter's ruminations on the British class system included the Cold War dramas *Traitor* (top), from 1971, and 1980's *Blade on the Feather* (with Donald Pleasence, far right), and the 1965 political satire *Stand Up, Nigel Barton* (right)



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THE GLITTERING COFFIN



Protective of the community-based England he had grown up in, Potter was evangelical in denouncing its colonisation by admass and its transforming of citizens into consumers. He attacked advertising in his book *The Glittering Coffin*, tabloid journalism in the play *Paper Roses*, and the mass-mediating of the memories stored in Daniel Feeld's cryogenically preserved brain in *Cold Lazarus*. He examined the consequences of over-identification with TV westerns in *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1966) and with the spiritual aspirations of 1930s songs in *Pennies from Heaven*. Disparaging admass in a 1957 *Isis* article and his 1962 book *The Changing Forest*, Potter had observed how teen consumption – of Elvis Presley's music especially – had disturbed the ancient rhythms of the Forest of Dean. The brash rock 'n' roll songs lipsynched in the Suez-era serial *Lipstick on Your Collar* aspire not to spiritual renewal but to affluence and instant sexual gratification.

In the nihilistic *Follow the Yellow Brick Road*, Potter used reverse psychology to cauterise television commercials. A cuckolded, failed actor who believes God has abandoned him, Jack Black has become so paranoid he thinks he's a character in a TV play. He loathes drama because it confronts the mess of existence, preferring instead the pristineness of commercials, little promises of heaven. After he swallows an antidepressant prescribed to him by an evangelising young psychiatrist,

CONSUMING PASSIONS

A young Ewan McGregor in 1993's *Lipstick on Your Collar* (below), plus (clockwise from top left) *Cold Lazarus* (1996), *Blackeyes* (1989), *Double Dare* (1976) and *Follow the Yellow Brick Road* (1972)

Jack's wife picks him up in her golden sports car and, kissing and laughing, they fly "over the rainbow". However, the idyll is a scene from an ad in which Jack touts the pills by quoting Paul's exhortation from Philippians 4:8 to develop a Christian thought life. As the academic John R. Cook has written regarding the play: "The false paradise of capitalism (advertising) is shown to be the same as the false promises of established religion."

In *Double Dare* and *Blackeyes*, Potter excoriates commercials that degrade actresses by placing them in subservient positions to phallocratic power. *Double Dare*'s Helen is put to the question by the playwright Martin about her decision to simulate fellatio in an ad for a 'Fraggie' chocolate bar and whether this is a form of prostitution. Losing his grip on reality, Martin eventually rapes and strangles Helen, as if in punishment for her collusion in the ad.

Advertising is the arena in which *Blackeyes* throws herself to the lions. She caresses a phallic cosmetics bottle while auditioning in a bikini for salivating ad executives and later pleasures their predatory leader on a sofa; behind it is a poster showing her sucking a Fraggie bar. Both scenes are intercut with fragmented moments from the history of Jessica Kingsley (*Blackeyes*' progenitor) as a sexual-abuse victim who eventually drowns herself – how could Potter not have been taken seriously? 📺



TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS

Bruno Dumont's austere evocation of the life of a troubled artist in a French asylum, 'Camille Claudel 1915', is driven by a complex, enigmatic performance by Juliette Binoche. Here the director explains why he urged her to 'do nothing' in front of the camera, and how the transcendent power of cinema helps transform reality to reveal the sacred in everyday life

By Jonathan Romney

TROUBLE IN MIND
Juliette Binoche plays the titular protagonist in *Camille Claudel 1915* (right), which illuminates a brief period in the life of the ill-fated sculptor when she was incarcerated in the asylum at Montdevergues in Provence

The face of Juliette Binoche is one of contemporary cinema's most finely calibrated devices for measuring, or suggesting, emotional complexity. However, many of her films – especially in the latest stretch of a career increasingly shaky on quality control – have relied too easily on Binoche's physiognomy as shorthand for a sort of cerebrally refined, hyper-compassionate inner turbulence. Still, Binoche's mastery of this signifying surface and its finer muscular tremors has rarely been used so intelligently, and so movingly, as in Bruno Dumont's *Camille Claudel 1915* – the story of the ill-fated sculptor, in which *le visage binochien* comes into its own as a sculpturally expressive medium in its own right.

Dumont's film is a portrait of Camille Claudel (1864–1943) at one specific point of her life as an inmate in the asylum at Montdevergues, near Avignon. Following signs of mental illness from 1905 onwards – after the breakup of her relationship with fellow sculptor Auguste Rodin – Claudel had been committed to hospital by her family, including her younger brother Paul Claudel, the Catholic poet and playwright of such demanding and severe pieces as the visionary epic *The Satin Slipper*. Her history, and especially her ill-fated romance with Rodin, were previously evoked in high Romantic register in Bruno Nuytten's *Camille Claudel* (1988), starring Isabelle Adjani and Gérard Depardieu.

By contrast, Dumont's drama is a characteristically austere evocation of a single representative cluster of days in the life of a patient who was to remain interned for the next 28 years after the events shown, and whose life – we quickly realise – would fundamentally remain the same, day in, day out. Following the stormy life Camille had led before being rejected by Rodin, leading her to destroy much of her work and







to retreat into seclusion, her life now becomes one of monotony and, her crises apart, calm introversion (the true extent of her madness has always been hotly debated). We see Camille mixing at a cautious distance with her fellow patients, moving around the hospital at Montdevergues (recreated for the film from archive photos), walking in the arid Provence landscape (captured in all its sunlit harshness by DP Guillaume Deffontaines) and gazing around her with what might still be a sculptor's eye. Binoche's minute flickers of attention prompt us to make assumptions about Camille's interiority as she watches the world, sometimes smiling, sometimes apparently pained – but the film never confirms or denies our assumptions, leaving us simply with the evidence of Binoche's face filmed at length.

In addition, a self-contained sequence within the film veers away from Camille to focus on her brother Paul (Jean-Luc Vincent), en route to pay her a visit: he records his thoughts on her illness, speaking in the severest religious terms (he muses on the possibility of 'exorcising' her), and later recounts his own epiphanic conversion to Catholicism in Notre Dame Cathedral during a Christmas service in 1886. As Dumont argues in the interview below, this section of the film is essential for what it reveals of the relationship, and the affinities, between brother and sister. It also sheds light on Camille's extended internment, and on Paul's seemingly punitive attitude towards her. In Dumont's view, Camille's strict Catholic family kept her in hospital until the end of her life because they considered her scandalous – as a

Bruno Dumont juxtaposes Juliette Binoche's translucent beauty with physiques and faces that are distorted by physical and mental discomfort

woman who sculpted, was involved with a much older lover, and had had abortions. "From Paul Claudel's point of view," Dumont says, "she had to expiate her sins. From the point of view of Paul's Catholic madness, it was a penance – she had to redeem herself to go towards God."

One element of the film that viewers may find either inspired or contentious is Dumont's casting of real-life psychiatric patients as Camille's fellow residents at Montdevergues. These women are clearly very disturbed, some of them may not be aware that they are performing in a film, and some are seemingly just being themselves regardless of their roles or of the camera's presence. One in particular, Alexandra Lucas (whose character is addressed as 'Mademoiselle Lucas'), has a powerful and disarming screen presence, with an energy and a range of intense expressions of anger or happiness that one hesitates to describe as 'child-like' or 'ecstatic' for fear of falling into the same conventional assumptions about mental illness that the film seems to be confronting.

The question of possible exploitation will inevitably cross viewers' minds, not because of any suspicion that these women were co-opted for the film against their will, but more in the matter of representation: notably in the juxtaposition of Binoche's famously translucent beauty with physiques and faces that are for the most part distorted by physical and mental discomfort. The patients' faces, bodies and comportment, however, hold a mirror to Camille's own, less obviously visible disturbance – and to that of the eminently restrained Paul, whose stern piety itself registers as a possibly deranged excess.

Dumont has habitually worked with non-professional actors since his debut feature *La Vie de Jésus* (1996). Critics, myself included, have often expressed qualms about his attitude towards such people, who sometimes can appear overwhelmed by, or arguably even compromised by, the often brutal dramas Dumont builds around them. Yet Dumont's compassion towards his characters has become clearer since 2009's *Hadewijch*, and it is most evident in *Camille Claudel 1915*: at once towards the tragic heroine; towards her fellows and the women who play, or rather incarnate, them; even towards the sacred monster who is her brother and jailor.

As a sometime Dumont sceptic, I regard *Camille Claudel 1915* as possibly his finest and deepest film to date. In the interview that follows, Dumont explains his views on transcendence and spirituality in cinema – views that I've hitherto found somewhat elusive – with great clarity, and not a little mischief. The new film sees Dumont at once consolidating on his uncompromisingly distinctive work to date, but also moving in a striking new direction. Mind you, it's perhaps not quite as new as the direction he seems to be headed in with his forthcoming TV miniseries *L'il Quinquin* (*P'tit Quinquin*), which premiered in Cannes – Dumont's first comedy venture, which he describes as "a sort of caricature of a cop series". But that's another story – watch this space.

Jonathan Romney: I believe Juliette Binoche contacted you with the idea of working together, and then it was a matter of finding a subject.

Bruno Dumont: I had to make her the right proposition. I'm used to working with actors who are the characters – so it's not about inventing a character, because I have the character there in front of me. I'd already worked with

professional actors, I know what the problems are. Actors can't do everything – they have a natural register in terms of their body, their voice, their presence. So I needed to come up with something for Juliette that related to her body, that was close to her. Hence the idea of portraying an artist. That's why I chose the date 1915, to be close to Juliette's age and for it to correspond exactly with Camille Claudel's. We see Juliette at that age, without make-up, so she's already halfway there before we even started.

JR: The film is set 28 years before Camille Claudel's death, and it seems that what we see of her time at Montdevergues is essentially the way her existence will be for the rest of her life.

BD: She does exactly the same thing for 30 years. I've read her medical notes, and in general, she does nothing with her time – she walks a bit, goes to church... Whether it's 1920 or 1930, she does exactly the same. I wanted to limit the action to a few days and concentrate on something everyday – notably the news of a visit from Paul, who's her hope and her joy. Remember, in 1915 she's convinced that she's going to get out – only we know that she won't. I told Juliette, "Smile, you're going to be released. Whatever happens, don't play her as a martyr." That's why she's always smiling.

JR: Some reviewers have been puzzled by the sequence in which we see Paul alone on the road, or talking about his mystical conversion. Would the film have worked without this section?

BD: It's hard to separate Paul from Camille's life, because he's responsible for her internment. Paul is the reverse side of Camille. He hates Camille and he loves her.

There's no more beautiful way of looking at someone than looking at their brother. Paul greatly enriches our understanding of Camille – she's his big sister, she always dominated her little brother. When we first see Paul, he has the stature of a poet, but when he's with Camille, he's 'le petit Paul'. We're all reduced to each other – without the other person, you don't exist.


JR: We come to realise that Paul's spirituality can also be seen as a form of madness.

BD: He even says he's chosen by God to pass on his word. He's totally mad... And he's symptomatic of the horror of that revolting French bourgeoisie, so vain and self-satisfied. He's Christian, but he can't even be bothered to take in his sister. Paul Claudel is the peak of Frenchness, at its very worst. And yet a genius. I'm French – but I'm very happy to see in Paul Claudel the most horrible image of our own culture.

JR: We see Camille at a moment where she won't be an artist again – but did you want to give a sense of the artist that she was, in the way she behaves?

BD: I didn't need to state it explicitly. But when you see her hands, her body, you know that this is a body that has sculpted.

JR: There are certainly sculptural resonances in certain shots – notably of her face. The small movements of her facial muscles are extremely telling.

BD: Sculpture is very present in cinema – when you film a face or a hand, the viewer immediately senses the equivalence. I always told Juliette to act in a very neutral way because the viewer was going to see something: "Even if you do nothing, they'll see Camille. So above all, do nothing." 

ABSOLUTE TRUTH
Director Bruno Dumont (left) was determined to shoot *Camille Claudel 1915* using real-life psychiatric patients, such as Alexandra Lucas (with Binoche, below), in order to give the film a documentary reality





Art should replace religion – the sincere spiritual experience you have looking at a Van Gogh painting is worth all your readings of the Bible



JR: The film's real-life psychiatric patients appear to be playing themselves, or perhaps just being themselves. How did that work?

BD: When you read Camille's letters, you realise how much she was affected by the women around her. She complains all the time about their madness, their cries, the faces they make; she says it's unbearable. The way to convey that is through the almost documentary reality of these women's daily lives. The problem was to shoot in a hospital. But I kept getting the answer 'no', and the reason was always a moral one: out of simple respect, cinema, which is fiction, couldn't approach these women. Then I was lucky enough to meet a psychiatrist who used art in his therapy and he agreed to let me meet his patients. Everyone you see agreed to be in the film – or if they weren't able to decide for themselves, their families agreed. When I showed the film to the families, they were very happy. I think the film had some therapeutic benefit.

JR: You're working in the context of a 21st-century system of mental health treatment, but what the film shows is still essentially a 19th-century system. Implicit in the film is that period's discourse on mental illness, with its stereotypes of female hysteria. When we see Alexandra's face, it makes us think of the romantic clichés of mental illness, especially her smile – which may invoke traditional associations of madness with exaltation. Are you attempting to defuse those associations?

BD: When we first see Alexandra, she's very violent, making all those grimaces; by the end, when she goes looking for Camille, we're no longer afraid of her. I can guarantee that the whole crew really was afraid of her at first. By the end we were all hugging her because we'd gone beyond all that. There are so many fantasies about mental illness that the only way to get over them is to do what Juliette did – she went and spent a week with the patients. I don't want to get caught up in cliché, but at the same time, Alexandra's face... you have to see it as it is, you have to learn to look.

JR: When we see Camille sitting in the sun, and she looks around her, there are long takes on her face. She seems to be deeply touched by what she's seeing – but we don't know for sure, because she doesn't express what she's feeling.

BD: That's the mystery. What's going on in Camille's heart? I have no idea. I told Juliette to sit in front of the tree, I filmed her, I filmed the tree – and the magic of cinema is that when you cut them together, something happens. I don't know what – but the viewer begins to sense it. I said to Juliette, "Do nothing, be neutral", and

the tree does nothing except be a tree. Edit them together and there's something else.

JR: Your films always show the world in a very matter-of-fact way, almost naturalistically. Yet people often talk about your cinema as one of transcendence. I've never been entirely certain about your attitude to transcendence, especially in cinema – whether it's something you believe in, or whether you're out to demystify it.


BD: [I'm interested in] a transcendence that's separate from the customary religious kind. It's a purely cinematic transcendence. It's deeply sincere – sometimes, in *Hadjewich* for example, I use traditional Christian iconography, whereas in *Hors Satan*, you're dealing with a transcendence outside God, the transcendence of nature. When I talk about Camille and the tree, that's transcendence – when what you see is no longer just what you see, when what you see becomes something else.

I believe in a real secular mysticism – you don't need religion. When you fall in love, that's the sacred – love is a mystical relation. The sacred is everywhere – and my cinema tries to show the sacred in ordinary life, in the profane, the everyday. I believe that cinema is a tool for showing that behind something, there's something else. It can be someone's face. When you see the face of Demester in *Flandres* [played by Samuel Boidin in Dumont's 2006 feature], there's something magic there.

JR: Do you find it in other directors' films?

BD: Yes. Look at Jean Epstein's films, like *L'Or des mers* [1932] – it's dazzling, it's pure, it's poetic. Bresson can't compare. Dreyer, Bergman, Kubrick – these are artists that put you in touch with transcendence. I believe art should replace religion – the sincere spiritual experience you have looking at a Van Gogh painting is worth all your readings of the Bible. I see Catholicism as theatre.

JR: In the past – for example, in an interview we did for the *Hadjewich* DVD extras – you've talked about being in opposition to Bresson.

BD: As a Catholic, Bresson considers that his art is in the service of God. Artists like Péguy, Bernanos, Bresson interest me because they reveal the fiction, the theatre in religion – in their work, religion rediscovers its true nature, which is art. I have no problem reading Bernanos or listening to Bach, I completely go with it. Religion is a fiction – and that's not to distort it, quite the opposite. The Old Testament should be represented on stage, why not, it's great – what's not so great is that people really believe in it. 



Camille Claudel 1915 is released in the UK on 20 June and is reviewed on page 72

MY SISTER'S KEEPER
Juliette Binoche's Camille (above left) awaits a visit from her brother Paul (Jean-Luc Vincent, above right), a man whose deep-rooted spirituality can also be regarded as a form of madness

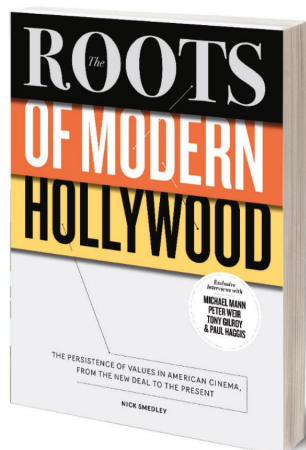
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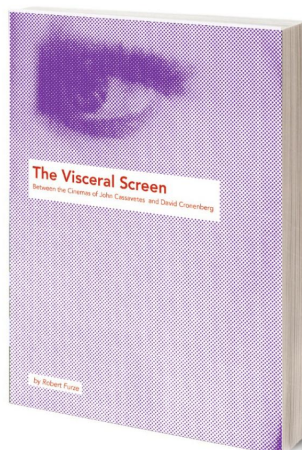


The Roots of Modern Hollywood

The Persistence of Values in American Cinema, from the New Deal to the Present

By Nick Smedley | ISBN 9781783203734
Paperback | £30, \$43

In this insightful study of Hollywood cinema since 1969, film historian Nick Smedley traces the cultural and intellectual heritage of American films, showing how the more thoughtful recent cinema owes a profound debt to Hollywood's traditions of liberalism, first articulated in the New Deal era. Although American cinema is not usually thought of as politically or socially engaged, Smedley demonstrates how Hollywood can be seen as one of the most value-laden of all national cinemas.

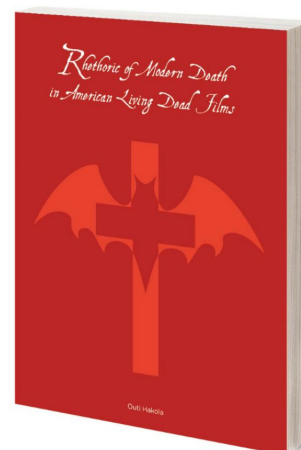


The Visceral Screen

Between the Cinemas of John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg

By Robert Furze | ISBN 9781783203703
Hardback | £60, \$86

The Visceral Screen sets out to articulate alternative ways of appreciating film aesthetics outside the narrative/spectacle continuum. Cassavetes and Cronenberg are established auteurs, but the elements of their films that appear to be barriers to their artistic status—for example, slipshod method and lingering violence or pre-digital special effects—are reassessed in *The Visceral Screen* as other indicators of creativity. In this way, Furze encourages debates of what makes a film good or bad—beyond how much it is seen to adhere to particular, established models of filmmaking.



Rhetoric of Modern Death in American Living Dead Films

By Outi Hakola | ISBN 9781783203796
Paperback | £43, \$30

Zombies, vampires, and mummies are frequent stars of American horror films. But what does their cinematic omnipresence and audiences' hunger for such films tell us about American views of death? Here, Outi Hakola investigates the ways in which American living-dead films have addressed death through different narrative and rhetorical solutions during the twentieth century. She focuses on films from the 1930s, including *Dracula*, *The Mummy*, and *White Zombie*, films of the 1950s and 1960s such as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Return of Dracula*, as well as more recent fare like *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *The Mummy*, and *Resident Evil*.



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THREE'S A CROWD
Zhou Yuwen (Wei Wei) is a housewife who has grown bored of her tubercular husband Dai Lyan (Shi Yu) and whose domestic life is turned upside down when her childhood sweetheart arrives from Shanghai




LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

A nationalist who sought to promote Confucian values, director Fei Mu emerged with China's Second Generation in the 1930s but rejected their leftist political agendas. Pursuing his own poetic, experimental trajectory, his cinematic voice found full flower in 1948's 'Spring in a Small Town', the tale of a love triangle set amid the post-war devastation of the Yangtze Delta


By Noah Cowan

Fei Mu is considered part of the Second Generation of Chinese filmmakers, memorably captured in *Centre Stage* (AKA *Ruan Lingyu*, 1991), Stanley Kwan's biopic of actress Ruan Lingyu. The Second Generation flourished in the 1930s, against the backdrop of the intense civil war between Chiang Kaishek's Nationalists and Mao's Communists. Unlike his contemporaries, such as Cai Chusheng, the director of *New Women* (*Xin Nüxing*, 1935), and Wu Yonggang, the director of *The Goddess* (*Shennü*, 1934), Fei Mu was not especially interested in furthering the leftist agendas of the film cadres who dominated his base at Lianhua Studios. He was instead viewed as a 'poet director', not much of a commendation during an age when political affiliation meant all. His interest in formal experimentation, symbolism, philosophical contemplation and use of subjectivity (a list identified by David Bordwell) set him apart from his contemporaries, who largely deployed Hollywood story structures and technique to convey their progressive messages.

In fact, Fei Mu took a dim view of all non-native philosophies of politics and art, with a particular disdain for the May Fourth Movement, the student movement and literary tendency that began in 1919 and which implored China to modernise through the selective implementation of Western ideas. Instead Fei Mu saw himself as a promoter of Confucian values, pre-Republican morality and steadfast nationalism.

He began his career working for Hou Yao, a legend of the silent era responsible for *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xi Xiang Ji*, 1927) – of which only a tantalising fragment remains – and the rather more stolid 



 *Mulan Joins the Army* (*Hua Mulan cong jun*, 1928). (Yes, that *Mulan* – Disney’s version is considerably more fun!) Hou Yao wrote an influential book, *Techniques of Writing Shadowplay Scripts*, which emphasised cinema’s theatrical elements, such as dramatic conflict and emotional intensity. Fei Mu struggled against this philosophy while making his first feature, *Night in the City* (*Chengshi zhi ye*), in 1933. Now lost, the film adheres to the Lianhua progressive cinema textbook from a plot perspective, yet was noted by critics at the time for its more subtle emotional register and its attention to realism.

Around this time, Fei Mu published his own essay on filmmaking, ‘A Brief Discussion of Air’, valiantly exegeted by the Chinese literature scholar David Der Wei Wang, who explains the idea at its centre: “Fei Mu proposes that a director should be good at creating air – the invisible yet crucial element that enlivens cinema – so as to [in Fei Mu’s words] ‘capture his audience’s attention and make them assimilated with the circumstances of the characters.’” This rather heady idea is apparently achieved through a careful linkage between camera and the object filmed, providing a sense of wonder to the audience beyond the experience of theatre. While it appears Fei Mu is attempting to create a dodgy fusion of Aristotelian physics and practical phenomenology, it is more likely related to the writings of scroll painters and calligraphers, especially in how they speak of emptiness and space on the canvas to account for the power of their work.

This traditionalist approach is also felt in the second major idea in his essay, a theory of ‘new drama’, inspired by both traditional Chinese and imported Western theatre that emphasises art as a moral teaching tool. Wang explains: “As Fei Mu would have it, new drama brings forth the ‘moral occult’ – elucidating virtues and vices of humanity otherwise eclipsed in actual life.” Circumstances suggest Fei Mu is reacting to the tiresome, metaphor-free leftist cinema around him by suggesting

a return to more traditional storytelling practices, but inspired by the confidence of Western morality tales.

The first instance of Fei Mu putting these principles to work (that can actually be seen today) is the respectable if rather leaden *Song of China* (*Tian lun*, 1935), an early sound epic co-directed with his studio boss in an attempt to rescue Lianhua from financial disaster. The film features an all-star cast and slavishly reproduces the tenets of then-dictator Chiang Kaishek’s prudish, fascist New Life Movement. A hoary tale of a young man torn between piety to his parents and the temptations of the city is undercut by impressive sequences of rich camera movement and a poised eye when choreographing crowd scenes. It is a well-made but conventional addition to the age’s cinematic heritage.

How shocking then is *Blood on Wolf Mountain* (*Lang shan die xue ji*, 1936), Fei Mu’s follow-up feature. A highly sophisticated atmospheric thriller with (impossible) shades of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963), it is a blunt allegory, recounting the story of Japan’s gradual hegemony over China by other means. Released just months before the full-scale invasion by the Japanese, it features a town suddenly entrapped by a band of once-docile wolves. Bold black-and-white landscapes and striking nighttime compositions give the film a classy *noir* flavour while Fei Mu’s use of menacing, howling sound effects are uncanny and something very new for Chinese film. Sadly, the film cannot be seen officially, though a print exists; the presence of actress Lan Ping – later to be known as Jiang Qing, Mao’s last wife and ringleader of the Gang of Four – has made its circulation difficult.

Soon after, Fei Mu directed a major Peking opera film, *Murder in the Oratory* (*Zhan jing tang*, 1937). Some critics suggest that his interest in opera, and especially its continuity with Confucian values, came from a desire to balance out the Western aesthetics creeping in to his more modern films. His next film, another Japanese invasion

BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Director Fei Mu (far right) toned down the melodrama inherent in the illicit love affair between the married Zhou Yuwen and her one-time childhood sweetheart, played by Li Wei (above, right), in *Spring in a Small Town* (above left), opting for psychological nuance and poetic undertone instead

allegory called *Nightmares in Spring Chamber* (*Chungui Duanmeng*, 1937), a ten-minute segment in the omnibus “inspired by music” film *Lianhua Symphony* (*Lianhua jiao xiangqu*), strongly suggests this interpretation is correct. A kind of demonic stalker fantasia, it helped introduce German expressionism into Chinese cinema.

In 1940 he completed his recently restored epic, *Confucius* (*Kong Fuzi*). Again an allegory – though this time a dispirited look at the failure of Confucius, and so China, to keep the peace through his teachings – it often feels stilted, overly noble and obsessively formal. Bordwell compares it to Mizoguchi’s *The 47 Ronin* (1941) and Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) but, despite some disarmingly modern flourishes, it lacks the former’s grace and the latter’s urgency. Its most important feature is Fei Mu’s increasing attraction to ancient visual arts compositions for establishing shots, during cutaways and even vistas seen outside windows.

Fei Mu’s career was put on hold, like most filmmakers, during the war years. He made two films between 1941–48, but little is known about them and both are presumed lost. In 1948 he agreed to collaborate with Peking opera legend Mei Lanfang on China’s first full colour film, *Eternal Regret*. (Also a title and theme riffed on by Stanley Kwan). Technical issues prevented its completion so Fei Mu took on a small project called *Spring in a Small Town* (*Xiao Cheng zhi Chun*), based on a short story by Li Tianji. Made in three months with little-known actors, it takes place in 1946, one year after the end of the Sino-Japanese War, and was released in 1948, months before the Communist takeover in 1949.

The film allowed Fei Mu to test some new theories from ‘On the Future of Chinese Made Cinema’, a second major essay he wrote after the war. It deplores the then-prevalent reversion to sentimentality in realist blockbuster epics such as *The Spring River Flows East* (*Yijiang Chunshui Xiang Dong Liu*, 1947) and seeks a way to transmit traditional Confucian values to a nation where history has been obliterated; how, he asks, will one now “ponder the fate of modern China”?

The plot reads like a conventional love triangle: depressed wife, bedridden husband, the arrival of a hunky doctor. But the film’s setting, the Yangtze Delta, the desolate epicentre of Japanese wartime destruction, is no place for love to blossom. Fei Mu also fully rejects the inherent melodrama in the story, opting for psychological nuance and poetic undertone instead. In a facetious moment, Fei Mu was quoted as saying: “In order to transmit the gloomy mood of old China I have undertaken a presumptuous and daring experimentation with my work, relying on the long take and slow motion, without seeking further craft. As a result the film comes across as being too dull.”

It is precisely these techniques, along with his radical use of dissolves within scenes and a strange hallucinatory voiceover, that have given the film its international reputation and remarkable resonance in modern and contemporary cinema.

The slowness of *Spring in a Small Town*, marked by a palpable hesitancy in the performances, emphasises how the characters lag behind their moment in time and are incapable of real action – a trick reactivated by Wong Kar-Wai years later in his own masterpiece *In the Mood for Love* (*Hua Yang Nian Hua*, 2000).

The long takes, especially those that linger over ruins, evoke the weight of history and the perils of nostalgia, strikingly like the celebrated cinematography of Manoel de Oliveira’s work. And yet those same takes also manage to evoke the exquisite detail of scholarly scroll paintings. Fei Mu has a particular fascination with walls and the vegetation that ekes a life out of their crevices; this metaphor has been deployed in Chinese art to highlight the difficulty of living in a state ruled by a harsh king, a subtle political dig that rhymes with the sombre, dispirited tone of his earlier *Confucius*.

Those astonishing dissolves have been written about with great insight by the Hong Kong International Film Festival programmer Li Cheuk-to: “Dissolves bring in a sense of continuity... the film’s long takes linked together by dissolves are so constructed that conflict and contradictions develop within the same space.” They are, in effect, a technique to further elongate key scenes, to brutally emphasise the film’s feeling of entrapment, while allowing a change in perspective for character and viewer alike. Though unique in his hands, one cannot help but think of Orson Welles’s highly original use of the dissolve in *Citizen Kane* (1941), though the two men deploy them differently and are after different metaphors and effects.

The film’s use of voiceover – eerily presaging the French New Wave and especially several films by Alain Resnais – has an unmistakable ghostly quality. According to scholar Carolyn Fitzgerald, the technique allows the wife, the film’s unreliable narrator, to draw our attention to the epistemological and psychological problematics of representing trauma.

These technical features of the film, however, do not fully explain its insistent modernity. For that we must turn to the film’s second half, as the protagonists wade into sultry, near-silent eroticism, mostly sublimated but occasionally, shockingly not. Comparisons to Antonioni, made by Bordwell among others, come closest to describing its discomfiting effect, but the gesture is very much Fei Mu’s own metaphor, bearing witness to the half-digested violation of China itself and the unbearable shame left in its wake.

Spring in a Small Town was savaged by leftist critics as decadent and ambiguous, and was disliked by many other critics for just being boring. It was a thorough box-office flop. In 1949, Fei Mu fled to Hong Kong and set up a production company, but died in 1951 before completing another film. *Spring in a Small Town* was effectively banned in mainland China for its petit-bourgeois “decadence”, its ideological “backwardness” and its alleged “narcotic effect”. Rediscovered at the China Film Archive by the Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers in the 1980s, it was shown several years later at the Hong Kong International Film Festival and proclaimed a masterpiece on the spot. It has been cited as a significant influence on their own work by such esteemed Chinese filmmakers as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang (who remade it in 2002), Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Stanley Kwan and Wong Kar-Wai. 📍



‘Spring in a Small Town’ was effectively banned in mainland China for its petit-bourgeois ‘decadence’, its ideological ‘backwardness’ and its alleged ‘narcotic effect’

i *Spring in a Small Town* is rereleased by the BFI on 19 June as part of its ‘A Century of Chinese Cinema’ season, which runs until 7 October at BFI Southbank, London. Noah Cowan will present an illustrated lecture to accompany the season on 17 June

PREVIEW

A FLY IN THE SOUP

Mocking, mischievous, ironic and pugnacious, Avi Mograbi uses documentary to tell Israelis some things they'd rather not hear

By Michael Chanan

Imagine a documentary about a progressive documentarist trying to make a film about an uncooperative right-wing politician. It's a recipe for a rather special subgenre; let's call it the serious documentary comedy. Locate it in South Africa in 1991 and you get a film by Nick Broomfield. Place it in Israel a few years later during an election campaign and you've got *How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Arik Sharon* by Avi Mograbi (1997). Punctuated by the filmmaker's personal diary-style confessions to camera, in which he owns up to having ghastly dreams about the general-turned-politician, what unfolds is not just an amusing tale about the excitement and frustrations of the chase but an investigation into the way the charismatic politician enters the filmmaker's psyche as he tries to get close to him. The result is a black comedy of which the filmmaker has remarked,

"I was forced to play the part of somebody who is not really me, and getting as close as possible to him made me play the part even harder."

So who is this Avi Mograbi? He was born in Tel Aviv in 1956 of immigrant parents: a mother who fled to Palestine from Germany in the 1930s and a father who was born in Beirut into an Arabic-speaking Jewish family. Politicised in his student days (art college, and philosophy at university), he is a man of the left who was sent to prison for refusing to serve in Lebanon in the 1980s. He started making films in 1989 and has developed, out of the simple video diary, a highly idiosyncratic style of self-reflexive personal essay, at once pugnacious and satirical about the corrosive reality he finds around him.

But when you watch his films, you can't always be sure what you're seeing. Turn to his next film, *Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi* (1999), or the one after that, *August: A Moment Before the Eruption* (2002), and you get the impression that he's a kind of imp, fond of pranks and scraps and prone to jokey disguises, putting a towel on his head to become Mrs Mograbi. *Variety* calls him a "gadfly documaker" and *Cineaste* quotes his own self-evaluation: "If some [filmmakers] see themselves as a fly on the wall, I see myself as

a fly in the soup". In short, he is a performative documentarist, like Broomfield, Michael Moore or Nanni Moretti, who acts himself up on screen: a playful and self-deprecating video diarist with attitude – and split-screen personality disorder.

Part of this attitude is a rejection of Zionist orthodoxies and solidarity with the Palestinians; part is a deep distrust of the orthodox idea of objectivity. Reality isn't punctual. As Mograbi puts it, it is never there in itself and it's always already being interpreted for us all the time. Besides, there is no such thing as a transparent camera; no way, for example, you can introduce a camera at a checkpoint without the soldiers noticing. The camera has a certain power: "You can almost blackmail everyone into behaving better." Whatever the situation, people respond to the camera, whether explicitly or not. But the intervention of the camera also has a tendency to backfire on you.

Reality isn't punctual. As Mograbi puts it, it is never there in itself and it's always already being interpreted



Double vision: *August: A Moment Before the Eruption* is like a cognitive map of social paranoia

Wherever he goes with his camera – doctor's waiting room, Tel Aviv beachfront, the Old City of Jerusalem – Mograbi finds a palpable atmosphere of paranoid aggression, which sometimes seems to be occasioned by the presence of the camera itself. In *August*, when he films a demonstration by Zionist settlers, he's beset by a stream of questions about who he's filming for. When he replies, "For myself; I'm independent", some of his interrogators take this to mean that either he's a freelance for an international news agency or a stringer for the police. He encounters the same suspicious questions from a bunch of casual labourers waiting on the roadside for jobs, working-class North African Jews on one side, Israeli Palestinians on the other, no love lost between them. In one extraordinary scene, the crowd don't just want to argue with the camera, they want to direct it as well. Filming the arrest of a couple of Palestine youths in the Old City of Jerusalem, Mograbi is surrounded by a bunch of hostile Israeli onlookers who complain that he didn't film the youths when they were throwing stones.

Mograbi plays the role of a documentarist trying to confront everyday reality in a highly ironic attempt to get inside the tortured Israeli psyche. The films are not conventional documentaries at all, but the staging of the problem of documentary truth-telling in the context of a national political disaster and a generalised state of denial about it. Mograbi himself calls them 'fictional documentary' and others call them things like 'pseudo-documentary', but this should not disguise the disturbing truths they tell. For all the barbed humour, there is a deep sense of apprehension in his portrayal of Israel. They are truths the Israeli audience doesn't much care to see, and they punish him by staying away. Indeed, Israeli filmmakers have long been caught in a bind, especially documentarists with a questioning attitude. Their natural audience shuns them and the domestic media marginalise them but abroad they win prizes precisely for asking awkward questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the character of Zionism.

I saw *Z32* (2008), in which an Israeli soldier confesses to killing two Palestinian policemen in action, in São Paulo, at a special screening during a film festival that was held in the magnificent auditorium of a Jewish community centre; it was very well attended and followed by a long and serious debate about the brutalising effects of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Mograbi is a good Brechtian, full of self-reflexive devices and self-interruption. He's at home with digital media but his suspicion of the conventions of mainstream documentary makes him distrustful of swish effects. He doesn't want the viewer to be taken in, so he wants the artifice to show – or, as *Variety* puts it: "Digital elements have a home movie feel that works with the personal message." *Variety* does not point out that in Mograbi's world, the personal is political because the political is personal.

This certainly goes for the soldier in *Z32*, who doesn't want his face to be seen, so Mograbi uses a constantly changing 3D digital mask with an uncanny effect on the stability of the viewer's



Manic montage: *Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi*

vision: you see and don't see at the same time. On top of that, he pulls off the trick of delivering his commentary in the form of songs, in an entertaining pastiche of Brecht and Weill, and calls the film a "musical-documentary-tragedy".

Naturally, he distrusts simple linear narratives. In *Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi* (1999), he plays a filmmaker commissioned to make a celebratory film about Israel's 50th anniversary. At the same time, he is asked by a Palestinian television station to shoot footage for a film they're making on the *Nakba*, or Disaster, as the Palestinians call the founding of Israel in 1948, when they were driven from their homes. Halfway through the film, Mograbi discovers that this year Israel's Independence Day, which follows the Hebrew calendar, falls on his own birthday according to the international calendar – a fact that seriously discombobulates him. But intertwined with the stories of the two films he's supposed to be making is a third, in which Mograbi recounts his attempt to sell a half-finished house on a disputed plot of land he bought ten years earlier. The black humour of this third story provides a tone that pervades the entire film. The result of this manic montage of disparate elements is a caustic view of the nationalism of the Israeli jubilee that was clearly shared by the audience at the documentary film festival in Tel Aviv where I first saw it. Granted, this was an audience of the intelligentsia, but I shall never forget how every time Netanyahu appeared on screen, they creased up in laughter.



Zionist myths: *Avenge But One of My Two Eyes*

(Who knows if they're laughing now?)

August is another three-stranded narrative, with Mograbi this time playing three characters: himself, his wife and his producer. Avi wants to make a film about the month of August, when it's too hot for comfort and which he sees as a metaphor for everything hateful in the State of Israel. His wife gets caught between him and his producer, who is trying to get him to make a film about Baruch Goldstein, the West Bank settler who massacred 29 Palestinians in Hebron in 1994. The film we're seeing moves back and forth between Avi's home, a series of gauche auditions for an actress to the play the role of Goldstein's wife, and the sorties with his camera on to the streets that I mentioned earlier. The resulting film is like a cognitive map of social paranoia.

Then there's *Avenge But One of My Two Eyes* (2005), which again combines disparate elements to deconstruct the heroic myths of ancient Israel so dear to Zionist ideology. The film takes its title from the biblical story of Samson and his suicidal revenge upon the Philistines, which provides the lyrics for a racist rock song sung by Jewish supremacists. Against the background of Palestinian suicide attacks, it makes Samson look like the first suicide bomber in history.

The Mograbi we meet in his latest film, *Once I Entered a Garden*, is mellower, dropping the pugnacity but keeping the irony as he engages his friend and Arabic language teacher Ali Al-Azhari in a dialogue about family history, displacement and cultural identity. Neither is typical of the official history told by either side. Avi laments the cultural loss suffered by his family when, buffeted by history, they abandoned their Arabic culture to migrate to the Zionist homeland. For his part, Ali is one of those driven from his home in 1948, but he has a prestigious job, is comfortably off by Palestinian standards – and his daughter's mother is Jewish. A smart eight-year-old, Yasmin contributes a peroration on racism at her Tel Aviv school, and we're left to ponder the intractable present and the unknown future. 🇸



Avi Mograbi is a special guest at Open City Docs Fest (17-22 June). See opencitydocsfest.com for details

I WORK THE LINE

While the use of film dialogue in music is nothing new, the internet has transformed the way in which musicians approach such samples

By Frances Morgan

In 2011 New York-based critic Masha Tupitsyn published *Laconia: 1,200 Tweets on Film* (Zero Books). In this Twitter feed in book form, the author's impressions of films scroll down the page, interspersed with dates, times and the breaks imposed by the 140-character limit of the medium. It's less of a news feed – Tupitsyn jumps from new releases to films she has just caught up with, as well as revisited classics – more an experiment in how criticism could be built, line by line, from in-the-moment responses to art.

Reading *Laconia*, you notice all the elisions and interruptions not only endemic to Twitter but typical of how thought and impression and memory jump, worry and snag in odd places. The exception is when lines of dialogue are quoted: they have an aphoristic charge perfect for Twitter. They recall the way dialogue samples are used in music as discrete events, hooks that propel a song.

Since *Laconia*, Tupitsyn has continued to experiment with discussing film online, now mostly using Tumblr. On her blog 'Love Dog' she samples from film more directly, at first with images, more recently with embedded chunks of dialogue or monologues from films. This has built up to an installation called *Love Sounds*, a preview of which can be seen on the site. Intended to run to 24 hours, in the manner of Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010), *Love Sounds* edits together dialogue from English-speaking films on the subject of romantic love – declarations of it, descriptions of a desired person, and so on.

The internet enables and perhaps even encourages this kind of accumulative response to film. But Tupitsyn's claim that her work "dematerializes cinema's visual legacy and reconstitutes it as an all-tonal history of listening" prompts the observation that a parallel process of writing cinema's history from an aural perspective has been happening – most notably in rap, metal and dance but also in more experimental fields of music – for many years.

In its earlier days, sampling from films gave an indication of which cinematic narratives, as well as sonic textures, had taken hold in musical subcultures; which videos, passed around, watched and re-watched, became part of the language of a musical genre. Not just in the sense that there are numerous rap records that use quotes from *Scarface* (1983): during its heyday in the 1990s film sampling seemed to generate magical hybrids, things that couldn't quite exist without each other, as in Wu-Tang Clan's indelible association with martial arts movies over numerous records. More abstractly, Dillinja's 1995 single 'The Angels Fell', which uses pitch-shifted dialogue from *Blade Runner* (1982) as punctuation, is just one of numerous drum 'n' bass tracks that sample Ridley Scott's film, turning it into a kind of unofficial backdrop to the music, an imagined future cityscape laminated on the real ones that reverberated to the music. Meanwhile



Future shock: Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*

technologised rock bands like Ministry used samples from films and news footage as a kind of response to information overload, a critical repurposing that flatters industrial music's listeners, who like to cast themselves as somehow immune to the power of the mass media. (1999's *The Matrix*, of course, has been much sampled, both dialogue and soundtrack.) No surprise that metal bands have peppered songs with quotes from *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Hellraiser* (1987), nor that figures have emerged like Rob Zombie of White Zombie, who as well as sampling vintage

horror went on to direct his own gorefest, *House of 1000 Corpses*, in 2000. You find more thoughtful choices from bands such as Today Is The Day, who have sampled from *Memento* (2000), *The Illustrated Man* (1969) and the documentary *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996) for songs that posit human cruelty and paranoia as more terrifying than any supernatural threat. More cosily, Saint Etienne situated their retro pop music by introducing it with quotes from *Billy Liar* (1963) and other Swinging London films; Manic Street Preachers relived youthful obsessions with tragic



Shogun Assassin



GZA's *Liquid Swords*

Hollywood heroines by way of samples from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The 1990s also spawned a good deal of unmemorable postmodernist splicing of film and music in the wake of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), whose soundtrack albums contained snippets of dialogue that seemed written and delivered with a view to being pulled out and endlessly quoted.

What the musician taking a line from an action movie and the theorist constructing an audio essay out of film speech have in common is the ease with which they can now find what they need online, and the speed with which it can be processed. A quote no longer even needs to be that memorable: it can be half-remembered, Googled then re-found within seconds. Perhaps one result of this is that the idea of the cult film, the shared reference point, now exerts less of a hold over musicians – will there ever be an equivalent to *Scarface* or *Blade Runner*, or is film now just one element in a vast sea of sonic source material, an element whose resonances are ever more personal and oblique? In this context, film dialogue can become, rather than a parallel history of the interconnection of film and musical cultures, merely sonic effect.

The use of film samples in footwork, the subgenre of house music known for hyper-complex, high-speed beats and dance moves, is both abstracted and historically resonant.

Is film now just one element in a vast sea of sonic source material, an element whose resonances are ever more personal and oblique?

Tracks are built from layers of vocal samples from records and movies, like microscopic construction blocks of rhythm and texture. Their brevity reflects the experience of skipping through film clips on YouTube rather than hours spent with a video or DVD pause button. On last year's album *Legacy*, producer RP Boo deploys a sample from *Shogun Assassin* (1980) on a track called 'No Return'. The opening track of GZA's classic 1995 album *Liquid Swords* uses the same monologue almost in full; RP Boo isolates just five words from the child's haunting narration that opens the film: "...And he never came out." This is repeated until it feels like melodic material, a hypnotic six-note pattern that's reduced even further to a strobing, almost unrecognisable loop. It moves further away from its origins, but still holds something of the cult significance of the film, and of the older track that first sampled it.

While the rapid repetition of isolated words in RP Boo's music contrasts with the unaltered dialogue in Tupitsyn's installation, both artists define a relationship between cinema, sound and cultural memory through digital tools. One involves a feat of recollection that would be near-impossible without the web's own accumulated digital memories; the other demonstrates the freedom to break apart and reconfigure memory. Aural histories of film can now be embedded on blogs, written on social media; it's no surprise that they will also be written in music software, on dancefloors, in headphones. 📻

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

At the British Silent Film Festival, long-forgotten stars once again enjoyed a brief blaze of glory



By Pamela Hutchinson

Fêted one year, forgotten the next, it's a sad fact that few British silent film stars enjoyed lasting fame. As the 1930s advanced, many well-loved actors fell into obscurity or retirement. Some moved on, or back, to the theatre. A shocking number died young, including poor, beautiful Lillian Hall-Davis, a bona fide star who killed herself aged just 35 after growing too depressed and nervous to brave the sound stages. With so many films lost to the winds and the flames, the names of Britain's first cinema celebrities are now remembered more by scholars than filmgoers. But the battle to reanimate the footnotes of our national cinema history rages and the British Silent Film Festival leads the charge.

No surprise, then, that at the festival's screenings in London's Cinema Museum this May, the once-familiar faces of Chrissie White, A.E. Coleby, Johnny Butt, Violet Hopson, Guy Newall and Ivy Duke filled the screen again, and were cheered by an appreciative and curious audience. To the delight of those assembled, Betty Balfour, the perky blonde queen of them all, was featured too, demonstrating her charm and mastery of comedy in a fetching double bill.

Consider it a testament to British eccentricity, and Edwardian distrust of both technology and 'women's lib', that two films present a typewriter as the third party in a marital dispute. In the short *Tubby's Typewriter* (1916), Johnny Butt (playing a recurring role one can only describe as the 'titular Tubby') accidentally enrages his wife (Hopson) by admiring a piece of office equipment. Out for revenge, each agrees to a blind double-date with a chum. You can guess the rest – we had to, since the denouement of this cheeky comedy was mislaid at some unknown date between the enfranchisement of women and the rise of the personal computer.

There was more passion, and a more sophisticated view of sexual politics, in *The Twelve-Pound Look* (1920), a J.M. Barrie play sleekly adapted by Eliot Stannard. In this invigorating drama, a rector's daughter marries a vulgar, grasping one-per-center (Milton Rosmer, cigar clamped constantly between his lips). The rector's daughter, Kate, soon seeks more meaningful occupation than enduring "fat dinners" with his "fat friends". Radically, she seeks freedom from luxurious marital subjugation in employment, which means slowly earning the funds to buy her own typing machine, and sets herself up as a typist. Jessie Winter, a former stage actress, made a sensible middle-class feminist out of Kate, smoothing down her skirted suit with more pride than she carried her ballgown

In 'The Right to Live', as in the best TV soaps, personality trumped narrative



Betty Balfour in *The Vagabond Queen*

and pearls. And in a film that wore its stage heritage most clearly in divinely acerbic intertitles, her Dear John letter was a hoot: "I am what you call making a bolt of it..."

The Twelve-Pound Look spoke with what we'd now call a BBC accent; *The Right to Live* (1921) was pure *EastEnders* elocution. A.E. Coleby's slice of working-class London life vainly attempted to cling to a plot involving trotting races, gambling and an estranged niece treading the boards. But, as in the best TV soaps, personality trumped narrative. These East End vignettes, starring director Coleby as an embattled patriarch – a fishmonger presiding over raucous family, worn-out wife and mournful father – were as vivid as they were unfashionably sentimental. Cockney title cards contributed a tang of welcome salt. "Old this lump of luv while I 'ikes 'em out" conveyed far more than "Mind the baby while I wake the other children" would have.

On to the most famous Cockney sparrow of the silent era and undisputed star of the hour. Ever since the announcement in April that a lost Betty Balfour film had been unearthed in the Netherlands, aficionados have been lamenting that her name has fallen so far out of circulation since her 20s heyday, her extant silents only rarely screened. At the Cinema Museum we were treated to a Ruritanian romp, *The Vagabond Queen*, and a Parisian Cinderella update, *Champagner/Bright Eyes*, both directed by Hungarian Géza Von Bolváry in 1929 and both starring the 'Queen of Happiness' herself. In the first, Balfour is a boarding-house maid spirited to 'Bolonia' to save one Princess Zonia from assassination. The caper has all the verve, wordplay and glamour of classic Hollywood comedy; Balfour is anarchically charismatic, whether flinging vegetables at jobs or executing slapstick moves in a satin gown with a six-foot train. Even better was *Champagner*, in which Balfour's dewy-eyed hotel kitchen maid struggles to catch the attention of dashing Jack Trevor. Despite the frothy plot, Von Bolváry shoots gay Paris as an expressionist ordeal – Balfour is spooked by towering shadows in hotel corridors while the neon signs leer and a stolen bottle of wine fades into a looming *gendarme*.

Will Balfour's name return to its former glory? And what about the rest of her long-gone cohorts? At this festival at least, it's as if they never went away. 📻

TOPICAL MALADY

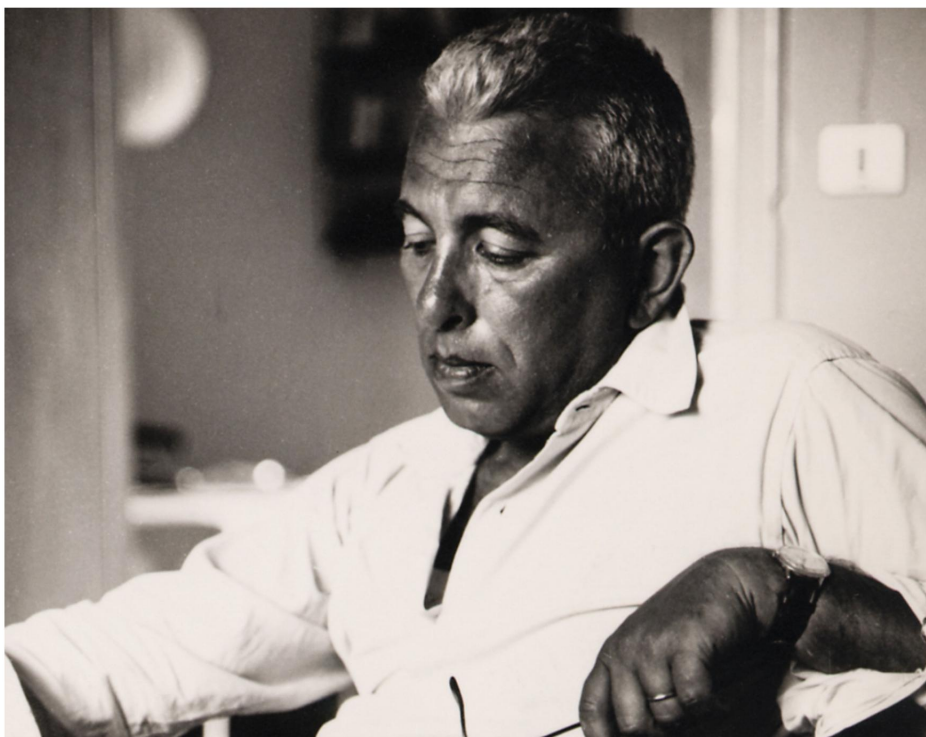
Legendary but little seen, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub's *Fortini/Cani* is both furious political polemic and aesthetic treatise

By Richard Porton

The films of the late Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub are often described as dauntingly austere. *Fortini/Cani* (1976) – now available on DVD along with the text that inspired it, Franco Fortini's *The Dogs of the Sinai* – makes it abundantly clear why Straub-Huillet's champions laud them as masters of materialist cinema and their detractors dismiss their work as arid enough to make even Godard and Gorin's 'Dziga Vertov' films seem frothy. The debates around their work, which peaked in the 70s, largely constituted an intramural squabble within leftist and academic circles. Straub-Huillet enthusiasts excoriated mainstream political cinema as irredeemably bourgeois; their critics found films such as *Fortini/Cani* and *Too Early, Too Late* (1982), which considered the relationship of radical texts to trademark panning shots of landscapes, punishingly hermetic.

Yet a second look at *Fortini/Cani* today upends many of the rote claims put forward by both camps. A meld of confessional monologue and media criticism, and a reflexive meditation on Jewish identity and the Italian Resistance, as well as a blistering attack on received ideas concerning the state of Israel, the film is far from a dry treatise: despite a characteristically languid pace, it's an angry, passionate denunciation of political conformism. A cross between documentary (a term Straub loathes), essay film and memoir, this unclassifiable hybrid is still incendiary because of Fortini's merciless critique of Zionism, a stance that uncritical defenders of the Israeli status quo would dismiss as Jewish self-hatred. It's doubtless this element that has made *Fortini/Cani* the subject of a masterly exegesis in Gilberto Perez's *The Material Ghost*, a legendary film more read about than seen. (Jonathan Rosenbaum claims that the New York Film Festival refused to show the film because it feared that the pro-Palestinian content would trigger protests from the Jewish Defense League.)

The jacket copy asserting that *The Dogs of the Sinai* is "as topical today as it was 45 years ago" is, unlike many other such assertions, blissfully free of hyperbole. The son of a Jewish father compelled to adopt his mother's surname to escape the fate of many of his compatriots, Fortini fought with the Italian partisans against the Nazis, and his anti-Zionism is irrevocably linked to his anti-fascism. In a dissenting response to the jubilation that greeted the Israeli victory in the Six Day War of 1967, there's undiluted contempt for "those who tolerated, without disgust, hearing or reading the same arguments used against the Arabs as those which the Hitler press formulated 30 years earlier against the 'Jude,' and which have been made, if possible, even more repugnant by a pedagogical democratic veneer". While musings of this sort were once considered beyond the pale, a burgeoning number of Jewish dissidents, including



Politics in a tragic key: *Fortini/Cani* is a blend of confessional monologue and media criticism

A cross between documentary, essay film and memoir, this hybrid is still incendiary because of its merciless critique of Zionism

organisations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and journalists like Max Blumenthal, are now making similar arguments with a considerably larger impact upon public discourse. Like Fortini, Blumenthal and his allies, despite being branded as traitorously self-hating, believe that platitudes about democracy and the legacy of the Enlightenment unreasonably insulate Israel from criticism and reinforce longstanding inequities.

It probably goes without saying that Straub and Huillet's appropriation of this still-controversial *cri de coeur* is not of interest to contemporary audiences merely because of its polemical thrust; after all, many films, even some by notable Israeli directors, have taken on Zionist orthodoxy in recent years. What remains noteworthy about

Straub-Huillet's judicious adaptation of Fortini's text is the way an autobiographical broadside is transformed into an equally impassioned, if less florid, aesthetic artifact. In 'A Note to Jean-Marie Straub' (included in the Seagull edition of *The Dogs of the Sinai*), Fortini himself recognises how Straub and Huillet's stratagems subtly shifted the focus of his peroration from personal rage to a complex historical document that explores "the relationship between the argumentations (or invectives) of the text and the attention (the word is Simone Weil's) of the camera".

Much of the film juxtaposes Fortini's reading of his own words on a terrace on the isle of Elba with either pertinent landscapes and cityscapes or emblematic shots that possess both personal and political resonance. Fortini's torrent of words is always eventually tempered by other images that do not "refunction" his musings in some sterile Brechtian fashion but actually, despite the requisite detachment, result in a plangent illustration of the disparity between the bloody past and radical, utopian hopes. A case in point is a pivotal sequence in which Fortini's disgust towards both the pro-Israel establishment and the Italian Communist Party is followed by a series of panning shots of the Apuan Alps that subtly allude, in the least melodramatic fashion imaginable, to the sites of Nazi massacres of partisans in 1944. The climactic shot of pastoral Marzabotto, a village where the Nazis killed some 770 civilians, is a macabre reminder that even intransigent leftists have to confront what the art historian T.J. Clark has termed "politics in a tragic key" – an awareness of "the sense of horror and danger built into human affairs".



Franco Fortini's *The Dogs of the Sinai* (with an accompanying DVD of *Fortini/Cani* by Straub-Huillet) is published by Seagull Press



Fortini/Cani

IN WITH THE OLD

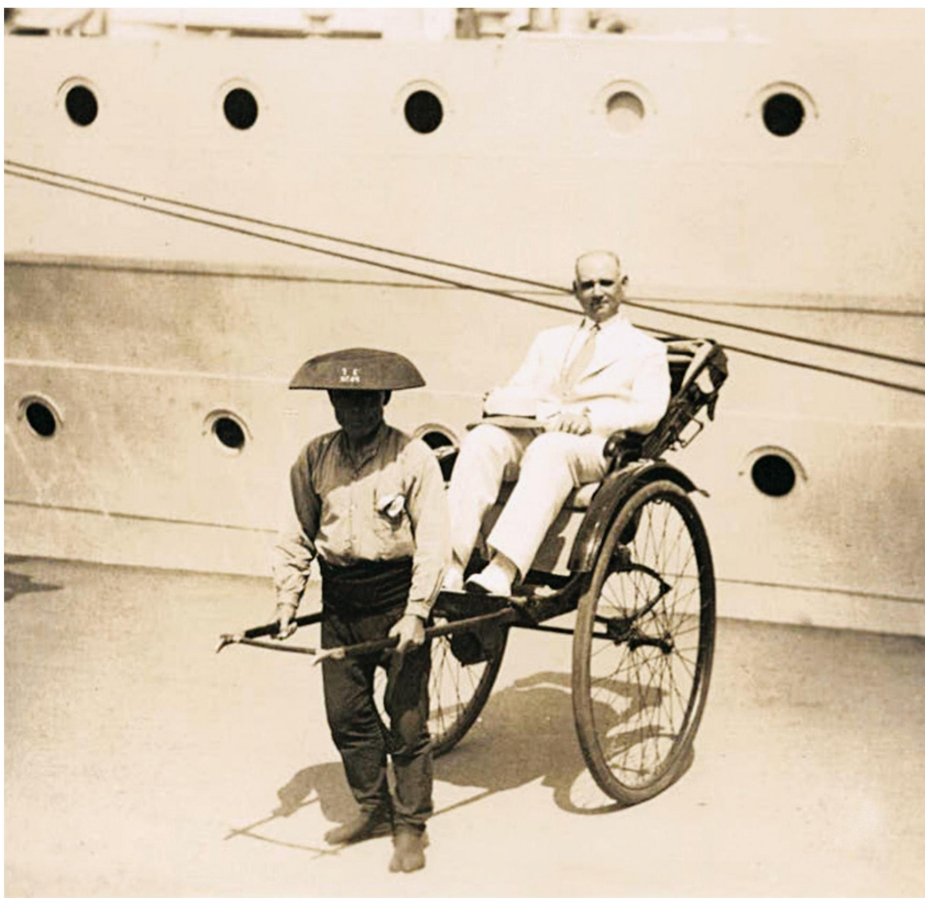
Cinéma du Réel showcased a host of arresting, rarely seen historical films, but the contemporary fare just couldn't match its quality

By Kieron Corless

Scanning the cornucopic programme in advance of this year's Cinéma du Réel documentary festival in Paris, two choices presented themselves: see one or two films in each of the many sections to try to get an overview of the festival as a whole, or exhaustively mine one or two seams. The latter was an attractive prospect given that several of the curated historical strands presented rarely screened glories. The 'Night Has Many Eyes' sidebar, for instance, corralled an impressive amount of material on the challenges and enchantments of channelling the night's mysteries; a two-part tribute to Jean Rouch focused on some of his harder-to-see ethno-fictions and films set in Paris; a strand on the ethnographic films of Raymonde Carasco and Régis Hébraud offered a thrilling, immersive encounter with the Tarahumara in Mexico, with whom Antonin Artaud had been similarly obsessed; and curator Federico Rossin's programme of Portuguese cinema's immediate response to the Carnation Revolution in April 1974 promised, in Rossin's words, "to suggest some ideas of visual revolt, and hope".

I opted for the first route – probably a mistake. The first two titles I saw, an accidental double-bill of essay films, encapsulated the problem. First up was João César Monteiro's mighty *Que Farei Eu Com Esta Espada?* (*What Shall I Do with this Sword?*) in the post-revolutionary Portuguese season, a collision of fiction, cinema history (Murnau in particular) and Portuguese mythology targeting American-led globalisation. It also included interviews with American sailors, militant Portuguese workers and Cape Verde immigrants. Monteiro was a communist when he made it but the film is anarchist in spirit, both militant and anti-militant, just two of the contradictions that impart a sense of urgent tension and manic, quicksilver energy. Tough act to follow. That job fell to the only contemporary British feature in the festival, *Late at Night: Voices of Ordinary Madness* by Xialu Guo, an honourable but flawed attempt to capture the worlds of working-class people in Hackney, where the Chinese director lives, as they struggle under the yoke of gentrification and other plagues. It somewhat undermined itself with ill-judged mock-newscasts and a smattering of literary quotations that didn't really add up to anything. Guo herself called it an essay film but that description flatters it.

The same dynamic – arresting historical work, disappointing contemporary fare – played out repeatedly with few exceptions. One of them, however, was another essay film, *Letter to a Father* by Argentinian veteran Edgardo Cozarinsky, playing in the international competition. In it, the director searches for patterns and meanings in his dead father's life. This belongs to the serene, classical wing of essay filmmaking, with its modulated voiceover, poetic disposition, elegantly braided argument and stately pacing;



A life less ordinary: Edgardo Cozarinsky's *Letter to a Father* sees the director near the top of his game

'Letter to a Father' belongs to the serene, classical wing of essay filmmaking, with its modulated voiceover and poetic disposition

nevertheless, it is moving and commands respect. If this felt like Cozarinsky somewhere near the top of his game, other big names fell short. Harun Farocki's study of a Berlin architecture firm, *Sauerbruch Hutton Architects*, was flat-footed, lacking the forensic insights into the ideological bulwarks of our contemporary existence that lit up his previous film, *A New Product*, although there was some mild humour to be had around the aesthetics of door handles, and bolsky Berliner clients. Olivier Dury and Marie-Violaine Brincard's



What Shall I Do with This Sword?

MGI, in the French competition, observed a group of students in the much-maligned *banlieues* outside Paris; at first fascinatingly intimate, it didn't seem to gather any real traction as it progressed. There were loud advocates on behalf of Yaël André's *When I Will Be Dictator* (*Quand je serai dictateur*) a gimmicky assemblage of home-movie footage with a tale of doomed friendship appended, but its top-note of alienation filtered through whimsy and nostalgia left me cold.

The main competition prize went to *Iranien*, directed by Mehran Tamadon, an Iranian filmmaker living in Paris. Tamadon, an avowed atheist and opponent of Iran's regime, invites four stout defenders of the Islamic republic to live with him for several days in his mother's house outside Tehran to thrash out some principles that might underscore peaceful co-existence between their respective kinds. Much of the discussion centres on the veil and female sexuality, Tamadon's liberal views inciting the most firmly patriarchal guest to describe him as a secular dictator, and later a fascist. A little bit of ground is ceded here and there, and differences begin to emerge between the guests, but it's all a bit too polite; the really thorny subjects are never mentioned. In fact the most eloquent scene is wordless. The men settle down on rugs for an afternoon siesta. Tamadon sleeps while the most vocal guest watches him – like a wolf about to pounce and devour? Or is there in fact a hint of protective tenderness? Hard to say, but it was in quieter moments such as these that unexpected ambiguities stealthily unfixed the abiding polarities. ☹



"AN ANARCHIST PUNK DREAM"
- SLEAZENATION

"DELICIOUSLY SUBVERSIVE"

★★★★★
- EMPIRE

"EERIE AND BEAUTIFULLY SHOT"

★★★★★
- LOADED

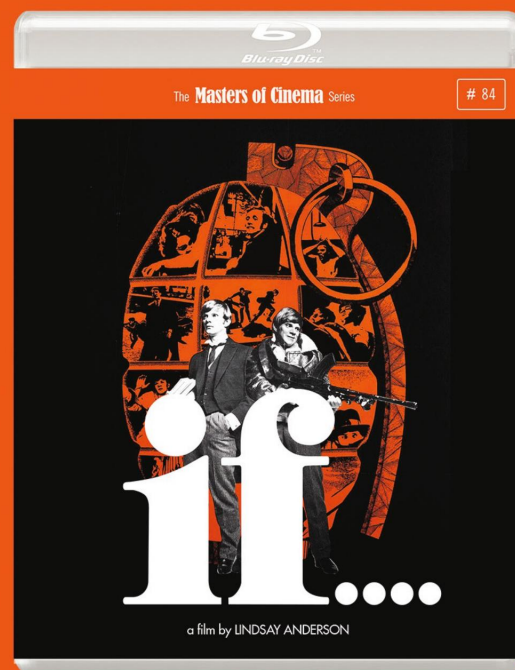
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Reviews



66 **Venus in Fur**

This is Roman Polanski's most simple and unalloyed film, a joyous two-hander and as near to a comedy as he has ever been – bearing in mind his customary attraction to discomfort, panic and a nagging imminence of the sinister.



60 Films of the month



68 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



Three stooges: Sam Shepard, Michael C. Hall and Don Johnson

Cold in July

USA/France 2013

Director: Jim Mickle

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Perhaps it's because of changing platforms, or the popularity of serial television dramas, or just an inevitable return to the New Hollywood ethic, but it seems that an increasing number of American independent films can't get financed or exist outside the festival circuit unless they're explicitly 'genre pictures'. (Seven years passed before Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* found funding, which probably means that the runaway success of Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive*, not the *Twilight* franchise, was a motivating factor.) While this trend is undoubtedly frustrating to the stateside filmmaker who aspires to be a Tsai Ming-liang rather than a John Carpenter, some recent standouts – David Gordon Green's *Joe*, Jeremy Saulnier's *Blue Ruin* and now Jim Mickle's *Cold in July* – don't simply reference existing tropes as part of a checklist, engage in cloying self-awareness

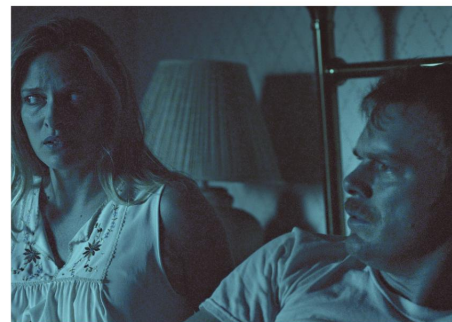
or offer up knee-jerk revisionism and 'twists'.

Cold in July is the most likely to draw comparisons to *Drive*, because of its source material, time period, synth score, sudden tonal shifts and violence. However, the deftness with which it traverses (or sometimes only suggests) different genres and social commentary and refuses easy closure is closer to Korean New Wavers such as Kim Jeewoon or Bong Joonho than to Refn's shallow exercise.

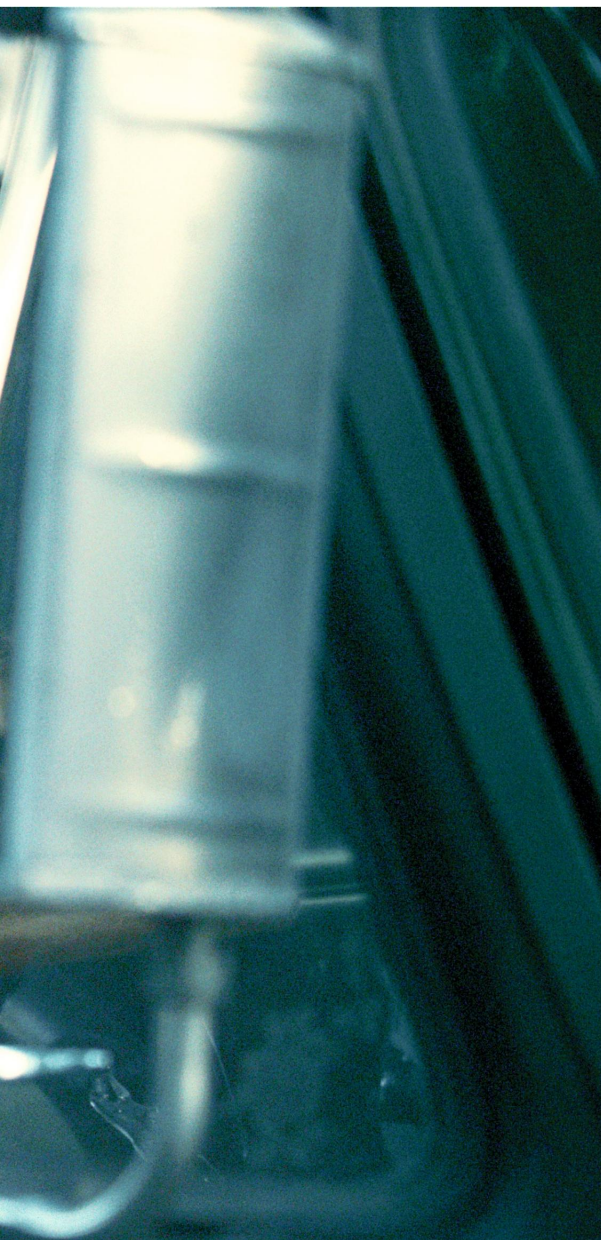
The incident that kicks off the film is an NRA wet dream: when Richard Dane (Michael C. Hall) fatally shoots an unarmed burglar after his "finger slipped", his actions are dismissed as self-defence because of the dead man's long criminal record. Richard is treated like an effeminate milquetoast for having any moral quandaries about the killing: Lieutenant Price (played with cheery condescension by co-screenwriter Nick Damici) expresses surprise that he had the strength to pull the trigger at all; the local paper writes up the story as though Richard has performed a public service. Although Richard's uneasiness in the days afterwards clearly hints at post-traumatic stress, this is East Texas in 1989, so his feelings are sublimated by beer, a new home-security system,

bars on the windows and a trip to the furniture store with his nagging wife to replace their blood-soaked couch. Death and its gory aftermath turn out to be totally banal in suburbia, not just on TV; Richard and his wife clean up the gallons of blood and bullet holes in their living room to the backing of James Carr's 'Forgetting You'.

When Richard falls foul of his victim's father Ben (Sam Shepard) at the funeral, the film takes a sudden turn towards 80s slasher movie: Ben is an ex-con imbued with a quasi-supernatural, Michael Myers-like ability to appear, menace



Vinessa Shaw and Michael C. Hall



baldly selfish. After he forges an alliance with Ben and Ben's old war buddy and private detective Jim Bob (Don Johnson), Richard spends less and less time with his family. (At a certain point, he convinces his wife he's going on an extended business trip, a lie made even more ridiculous by the fact that he owns a small framing shop.) The macho camaraderie of these older men is a vacation from his responsibilities and timid existence; sitting alongside them on the porch of Jim Bob's pig farm, drinking beers and staring at nothing, he's simultaneously with them and enjoying a type of voyeurism that teenagers often do when with older, cooler people.

As Richard's recklessness increases, Ben becomes grounded and humanised as he feels the regret of never being there for his son. Regardless of whatever mood it's pursuing, *Cold in July* is always about fathers and sons, absent or present – sometimes even before we realise it, as when Richard uses his deceased father's gun to shoot the intruder. But more than just encouraging us to identify with him, the film begins to mimic Ben's character, not Richard's: the silences are heavier and more frequent, and the violence becomes banal again, albeit tinged with a code of honour. With the arrival of the swaggering, larger-than-life Jim Bob, first introduced driving a red muscle car a mile long, the tone is set for the conclusion, which mixes elements of Paul Schrader's *Hardcore* (1979) with a shootout that's pure wish-fulfilment. It unfolds like a revised version of the Alamo, where this time America triumphs with a total bloodbath, and its action-film heights are tinged with sadness even though the 'good guys' survive. This is perhaps the only time the film is grindingly predictable but it also completes the circle, returning us to

*Shepard and Johnson's
flawless rhythm allows the
two men to move between
chest-thumping displays of
masculinity and petty bickering*

where we started. We can only imagine future events, negative or positive, that might temper the Capra-esque normalcy as the credits roll.

Though the sudden shifts in tone were in Joe R. Lansdale's original crime novel, it's really the strength of Mickle and Damici's script that makes *Cold in July* lean and consistently tense rather than verbose and confusing. (Richard Kelly's disastrous 2006 film *Southland Tales* springs to mind as a classic example of what not to do when genre-bending.) Of course, this accomplishment is helped by fantastic performances from Hall, Shepard and Johnson. Hall could easily have fallen prey to playing Richard as priggish or a blank slate, but instead imbues him with a weariness that comes through even in moments of anxiety or foolhardy curiosity. (Maybe he really did deserve that vacation from his family.) Shepard and Johnson are in a class of their own, with a flawless rhythm that allows the two men to move between chest-thumping displays of masculinity and petty bickering. While the meat of Shepard's role gives the otherwise typecast playwright something to sink his teeth into, Johnson's role harks back to his 80s heyday as Sonny Crockett. Aside from the Texas-sized bravura and colour-coordinated country wear, a wordless, extended scene of him coolly driving at night (powered by Jeff Grace's thumping synths) clearly references Crockett's sullen 'In the Air Tonight' moment in the *Miami Vice* pilot, if not the show's overarching love for quasi-music video sequences.

When not obliquely referencing other films or genre conventions, Mickle demonstrates a keen ability to compose a shot and hold it. Even simple establishing shots – Richard watching TV with his family, suburban street corners or the rickety barns of Jim Bob's pig farm in the early morning – are given a beauty usually not afforded this kind of American iconography. Cinematographer Ryan Samul also keeps pace, equally comfortable using naturalistic tones and stagey, unmotivated light sources when consistent with genre. (Close to the shootout's climax, blood is sprayed on a ceiling fixture, bathing the room in an eerie cherry red.)

This impressive work leaves little to be desired, except a decent female character. **S**

Richard's son and then disappear into thin air. The police's *de rigueur* ineptitude sets the stage for total war, transforming Richard's simmering anxiety into furious anticipatory terror. (Mickle and Damici's previous trio of progressively more impressive horror films have honed their aptitude for playing with horror semantics and heightening tension.) The cycle of either snapping at his family because of the stress or helping them avoid sudden death is broken when Price informs Richard over the phone that Ben is headed back to jail indefinitely. Richard, in giddy anticipation of closing the book on this case forever, speeds towards the precinct in his wood-panelled station wagon, blasting some upbeat hair metal. But as he's wrapping things up at the station, he notices an old wanted poster for Ben's son and realises – despite Price's protestations that he's being hysterical – this wasn't the man he killed in his living room.

As demonstrated first by his appearance and apology at the funeral of Ben's 'son', and later when he saves Ben's life, Richard has a desire to "make things right". However, his dogged pursuit of the truth – as the film becomes a southern-fried detective tale – slowly slides into behaviour that's

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Linda Moran
Rene Bastian
Adam Folk
Marie Savare
Written by
Jim Mickle
Nick Damici
Based on the novel
by Joe R. Lansdale
**Director of
Photography**
Ryan Samul

Edited by
John Paul Horstmann
Jim Mickle
Production Designer
Russell Barnes
Music
Jeff Grace
**Production
Sound Mixer**
Michael Sterkin
Costume Designer
Elisabeth Vastola

**Production
Companies**
IFC Films and BSM
Studio present
a Belladonna
production in
association with
Backup Media and
Paradise City
Executive Producers
Jean Baptiste Babin
David Attan-Jackson
Joel Thibout

Emilie Georges
Nicholas Shumaker
Manuel Chiche
Jack Turner

CAST

Michael C. Hall
Richard Dane
Sam Shepard
Ben Russell
Vinessa Shaw
Ann Dane

Nick Damici
Lieutenant Ray Price
Wyatt Russell
Freddy Russell
Don Johnson
Jim Bob Luke
Brogan Hall
Jordan Dane
Lanny Flaherty
Jack Crow
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

East Texas, 1989. Mild-mannered family man Richard Dane shoots an unarmed intruder in his living room. Because the intruder, Freddy Russell, had a long list of criminal offences, Richard's act is written off as self-defence by Lieutenant Price and earns him hero status with the gun-loving townfolk.

Deeply conflicted about what he's done, Richard struggles to return to normality. He encounters Ben, the intruder's father, who happens to have recently completed a lengthy prison sentence for an undisclosed violent crime.

Seeking vengeance, Ben begins threatening Richard's young son, at one point ominously leaving a single bullet on a chair in his bedroom. After a few

nights of police surveillance, Price informs Richard that Ben has been apprehended near the Mexican border. But Richard's relief is short-lived, as he discovers that the man he shot wasn't actually Freddy.

Trailing Price one night, he rescues a drugged Ben from being run over by a train. The two join forces with Ben's friend Jim Bob and attempt to find Freddy. It transpires that Freddy was formerly involved with the Dixie mafia, and went into the witness protection programme after informing on them, but now makes a living producing snuff films with underage Mexican prostitutes. Disgusted, Ben vows to kill Freddy. The trio raid the compound where the videos are made. Ben finally meets his son, then kills him.

Fruitvale Station

USA 2013

Director: Ryan Coogler

Certificate 15 84m 58s

See Rushes
on page 10

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Ryan Coogler's debut *Fruitvale Station* is a perceptive docudrama that reconstructs the final day in the life of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old black

resident of Oakland, California. In the early hours of New Year's Day 2009, Grant became embroiled in an altercation on a train, and, along with some friends, was subsequently restrained on the platform at the eponymous Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station by a number of openly hostile BART cops. Face down, with his hands held behind him, the unarmed Grant was shot in the back by a white officer and died several hours later. The offending officer, as a closing title card coolly confirms, served 11 months of a sentence for involuntary manslaughter – he mistook his gun for his Taser, apparently – before being released. The incident sparked outrage, not to mention a public debate about the intersection of race, police brutality and civil justice.

The shooting was captured on countless camera phones and subsequently went viral – Coogler's film opens with footage taken by one of these bystanders. By kicking off the film in this manner, the director acknowledges the primacy of authenticity and casts a dark, foreboding shadow over everything that follows. The use of this disturbing footage recalls Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), which opened with amateur video of the savage beating of unarmed black motorist Rodney King – also in California – by a group of LAPD officers. The use of such media in both films immediately establishes the spectre of profound institutional malaise that will haunt the forthcoming narrative.

After its shocking opening, *Fruitvale Station* assumes the form of a fictionalised portrayal of Oscar, beginning the previous morning. He's played by Michael B. Jordan, whose multilayered performance oozes everyman charisma; the actor's twitchy yet robust physicality and earnest, deep-pool eyes make for a consistently arresting point of contrast in the character. We



Arianne Neal and Michael B. Jordan

first encounter him having a heated discussion with his girlfriend Sophina (Melonie Diaz), who suspects him of infidelity. They soon make up, so Oscar drives her to work, and their four-year-old daughter Tatiana (Arianne Neal, adorable) to preschool. The rest of the day proceeds in an unremarkable but episodic and elegantly paced manner: a catalogue of minor everyday struggles for a man aiming to get his life on track. Oscar heads to the supermarket to pick up some crabs for a birthday party for his mother (Octavia Spencer). While there, he also attempts to regain his job – he's been fired for persistent lateness – but his ex-boss is having none of it. Strapped for cash, Oscar considers selling weed to a friend but thinks better of it, before heading to his mother's house. From there, he heads out to party, the train rolls into Fruitvale, and the rest is history.

Coogler deliberately sets about creating, in Oscar, a relatable, likeable and flawed protagonist. There have been curious charges from some critics that he has sanctified his subject, but the evidence doesn't support this claim: Oscar is shown to have served time in jail; neglects to admit to his family that he's lost his job; is quick to bristle (as evidenced by the scene in which he fails to get his job back); and no secret is made of the fact that he hasn't always been

Shorn of its tragic narrative bookends, 'Fruitvale Station' would still make a fine, and all too rare, slice of black-focused, low-key drama in its own right



Law and disorder: Michael B. Jordan as Oscar, with Kevin Durand as Officer Caruso

faithful to Sophina. But he's also capable of compassion: witness his tenderness with his daughter, his easy camaraderie with friends and family, and the way he looks after a pit bull that's been flattened by a speeding car – a blunt but effective use of dramatic licence.

With uncanny, depressing timing, the film's US release in July 2013 coincided with the verdict in a similar, later case: that of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who was gunned down by neighbourhood-watch vigilante George Zimmerman in Florida. Zimmerman too escaped punishment. *Fruitvale Station* accordingly assumed the status of a hot-topic movie, but it's not in essence an incendiary work. It focuses on its subject's humanity and assesses the tragedy on a personal rather than explicitly sociopolitical level. However, the way in which it fleshes out Oscar's character makes it an acutely political work. Contrast Coogler's sensitivity with the ridiculous 'deconstruction' of the thug archetype personified by Ludacris and Larenz Tate's hyper-articulate, perma-postulating car-jackers in Paul Haggis's doolally *Crash* (2004). *Fruitvale Station* avoids such frippery, and in an understated way challenges the pervasive media stereotype of the young, urban black male as an irredeemable, oppositional 'thug', whose clothing (hoodies, low-slung jeans etc) and carriage signify some inherent hostility. Trayvon Martin's image in death, for example, became a hostage to a polarised media landscape, while in the UK a similar fate befell Mark Duggan, the young – and again, unarmed – mixed-race man whose killing by police precipitated the UK riots of 2011.

Among the more quietly galling aspects of *Fruitvale Station* is the pervasive sense that, shorn of its tragic narrative bookends, it would still make a fine, and all too rare, slice of black-focused, low-key drama in its own right. The keen observation and laidback aesthetic of its opening hour recall Charles Burnett's wry *My Brother's Wedding* (1983). The scenes set inside various family homes, meanwhile, have a particularly tender, tactile quality, redolent of the probing intimacy of Abdellatif Kechiche's recent *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (2013). Cinematographer Rachel Morrison shoots in warm, grainy and mostly handheld Super 16, darting in and around the characters and giving us the sense of being firmly inside the family circle. Ludwig Göransson's subtle score is ambient rather than tuneful, and gently ebbs in and out of perception to the rolling rhythms of Oscar's day.

Fruitvale Station isn't perfect – Coogler falters in his occasional tendency towards dramatic overstatement. The tone is sufficiently ominous without the need for, say, the late sequence in which Tatiana clairvoyantly expresses her fears for her father's safety. Similarly, the unlikely recurrence of characters at coincidental times feels forced, even if the action does unfold against the woozy, uncommonly communal backdrop of New Year's Eve. Yet these issues dissipate by the time of the superbly staged platform incident, which is tense and genuinely upsetting, even though we've been fully prepared for it. An elegiac tone is subsequently fostered by Spencer's moving performance in the ensuing hospital vigil scene.

Regarding its portrayal of the broader issues surrounding the killing, Coogler is pragmatic. He leaves the real-life fallout – the legal judgement, the fate of the cops, local protests both peaceful and violent – to factual title cards, understanding that volatile expressions of emotion, or *Do the*



Everyman charisma: Michael B. Jordan as Oscar

Right Thing-style dialectical provocation would rupture the film's carefully calibrated tone and shift the focus away from Oscar. Some may see this as a cop-out but it's tonally deliberate. Instead of trying to make an omniscient authorial judgement, Coogler positions himself as a humane, awestruck spectator alongside us, trying to make sense of a senseless tragedy.

Despite Coogler's restraint, uncomfortable truths pulse beneath the surface. When the camera momentarily rests on the panicked face and wild eyes of the offending cop (played by Chad Michael Murray) in the immediate aftermath of his transgression, I thought of a passage from James Baldwin's provocative 1976 essay on cinema 'The Devil Finds Work': "The root of the white man's hatred [for black men] is terror, a bottomless and nameless terror, which focuses on the black, surfacing, and concentrating on this dread figure, an entity which lives only in his mind." It was that frightened look in the actor's eyes, signifying something deeper than language ever could, which lingered in my mind longer than anything after the final credits rolled. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nina Yang Bongiovi
Forest Whitaker
Written by
Ryan Coogler
Director of Photography
Rachel Morrison
Editors
Michael P. Shawver
Claudia S. Castello
Production Designer
Hannah Beachler
Music Composed by
Ludwig Göransson
Production

Sound Mixer
Darcel Walker
Costume Designer
Aggie Guerard
Rodgers

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Production Companies
The Weinstein Company presents a Significant production Supported by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program, with additional

support from the Cinereach Project at the Sundance Institute, the Sundance Institute/Indian Paintbrush Feature Film Fellowship and the Sundance Institute/Time Warner Fellowship Produced in association with San Francisco Film Society & Kenneth Rainin Foundation

Executive Producer
Michael Y. Chow

CAST

Michael B. Jordan
Oscar Grant
Melonie Diaz
Sophina
Kevin Durand
Officer Caruso
Chad Michael Murray
Officer Ingram
Ahna O'Reilly
Katie
Octavia Spencer

Wanda
Ariana Neal
Tatiana
Keenan Coogler
Cato
Trestin George
Brandon
Joey Oglesby
Cale
Michael James
Carlos
Marjorie Shears
Grandma Bonnie

Dolby Digital
In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor
Altitude Film
Distribution

The film begins with actual camera-phone footage of an incident that took place in the early hours of New Year's Day 2009 at the Fruitvale BART station in San Francisco. A crowd of people watch as a man is forcibly restrained, face down on the floor, by a BART police officer. The officer draws a gun and a shot is heard.

Now in the form of fictionalised drama, the film flashes back to the previous morning and tracks the day in the life of the man, 22-year-old Oscar Grant. He patches up his strained relationship with his girlfriend Sophina; tries

unsuccessfully to get his old job back; buys food for his mother's birthday party; recalls a spell in prison in 2007; throws away a bag of weed that he was initially going to sell to a friend; collects his young daughter from school; and attends his mother's party.

He goes out to celebrate New Year's Eve with friends but becomes involved in an altercation on the train with a former fellow inmate. BART police arrive and detain Grant and several of his friends on the platform. Grant is shot. He is taken to hospital, where he dies.



Pipe dreams: Brandon López as Juan, with Rodolfo Domínguez as Chauk

The Golden Dream

Mexico/Spain/Germany/USA 2013

Director: Diego Quemada-Díez

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

Ken Loach's influence may not be so prevalent in current UK filmmaking, but turn to the Spanish-speaking world and he remains a key reference point for a number of directors forging tough, angry, social-realist works in which politics are clearly worn on the sleeve. Fernando León de Aranoa's *Mondays in the Sun* (2002), for example, followed *Raining Stones* (1993) in capturing the frustration of jobless men trying to retain their dignity in the face of long-term unemployment brought about by the collapse of industries previously serviced by working-class urban communities. Indeed, much of the Spanish director's subsequent trajectory can be mapped to concerns that have similarly informed Loach's cinema. Icíar Bollaín – who played the fervent militia combatant Maite in *Land and Freedom* (1995) – is perhaps the most visible Spanish exponent of Loach's approach, prioritising location shooting, quotidian settings, continuity filming and extensive preparatory research in a body of six films that includes *Even the Rain* (2010), scripted by her partner, and Loach regular, Paul Laverty.

Now, Spanish-born Mexico-based Diego Quemada-Díez, who first worked with Loach as a clapper loader on *Land and Freedom*, follows Bollaín in acknowledging a very clear

debt to the British director in his own debut feature. But where Bollaín's cinema sometimes brushes against the poetics of sentimentality, Quemada-Díez's aesthetics lie in an altogether more austere register. *The Golden Dream* blends *cinéma vérité* with a documentary lyricism in which narrative, mood and matter are fused to potent effect. The result is an uncompromising, acutely observed and politically inflected take on the familiar tale of vulnerable Central Americans making the perilous journey across the border from Mexico to the US.

Quemada-Díez's narrative focus is on child migrants – specifically a trio of Guatemalan teenagers who offer each other support and companionship in the face of indifference and cruelty from the majority of adults they encounter on their journey. He eschews the high-action gangland theatrics of Cary Jôji Fukunaga's *Sin nombre* (2009) in favour of a more nuanced poetic approach, in which landscape is a marker for emotions. Quemada-Díez worked as camera operator on Alejandro González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* (2003), and while *The Golden Dream* rarely deploys the extreme close-ups that are so characteristic of the latter's work, there are certain aspects of Quemada-Díez's filmmaking that point to shared thematic concerns: a focus on sweeping landscapes, the identification of emotional connectivity through touch rather than words, and a dramatisation of the borders that have been accentuated by globalisation's forward march. The sheer energy of the opening sequence recalls the accelerated pulse of *Amores perros* (2000).

The adolescent Juan (Brandon López) is first

viewed walking with a defiant sense of purpose through one of Guatemala City's less salubrious quarters. He says little – indeed this is a film that shuns easy explanations and gratuitous exposition. The camera observes him as he sews dollars into the waistband of his trousers and picks up his travelling companions, the smaller, less confident Samuel (Carlos Chajon) and Juan's pragmatic girlfriend Sara (Karen Martínez). Aware of the dangers a young woman faces en route to the border, Sara has bound her breasts and cut off her hair in a ramshackle public toilet and refashioned herself as 'Osvaldo'. The sequence is enacted without a single word being spoken.

The opening scene plainly demonstrates the urban poverty these teenagers are seeking to leave behind. Soldiers march with intent through the narrow graffiti-marked streets, where fragile homes are barely protected by thin slivers of corrugated aluminium and cardboard walls; locals look out forlornly from doorways or scavenge in the massive wastelands where trash is piled high. The noises of police sirens, barking dogs and crying children fuse to create a grating soundscape, and two rows of black-and-white posters on a wall show the faces of what seem to be disappeared persons, their faded faces staring out as if warning of the fate that likely awaits the film's teen protagonists.

In one of the most gruelling sequences, Sara is molested by a gang of thieves who have halted the train the trio are travelling on and robbed them of their few remaining possessions. The thieves identify Sara as an *hembra* (a term habitually used to denote a female animal), and proceed



Quemada-Diez acknowledges a very clear debt to Ken Loach here, blending cinéma vérité with a documentary lyricism in which narrative, mood and matter are fused to potent effect

to herd her into a lorry alongside other young women, to be driven away to what looks like a grim future in prostitution. Her disappearance is both abrupt and violent; there is no sermonising or resolution, simply the sound of her screams.

Quemada-Diez's lean script (realised with Gibrán Portela and Lucía Carreras) was forged from the personal testimonies of some 600 migrants, and the film keenly positions Juan, Samuel and Sara as part of a large wave of human traffic moving en masse towards the US border. They are dwarfed by the landscape, by the large goods trains they struggle to jump aboard, by the imposing adults who seek to make money from them and by the police with batons and guns who harass them, so that the viewer is constantly reminded of their vulnerability as children. In one very moving sequence, the teenagers pose in front of a painted backdrop to have their photographs taken. Samuel waves a Guatemalan flag as he and Sara strike smiley stances in front of the Stars and Stripes; Juan poses on a toy horse in a cowboy outfit, toy gun in hand, against a pastoral image that bears little resemblance to the hostile environment he encounters on his travels. The film posits Juan's materialistic approach to life – the camera repeatedly picks out his prized cowboy boots – against the more spiritual attitude of Chauk, the Tzotzil Indian who joins them on their journey. And while the film steers clear of easy messages, the macho Juan repeatedly finds his beliefs challenged by Chauk's less aggressive philosophy. It is to Quemada-Diez's credit that he is able to suggest a softening of Juan's individualism without this ever appearing mawkish.

The director withheld aspects of the storyline from the non-professional cast in veritable Loach manner, and this secures an acting register that never appears forced or theatricalised. There is something brittle in López's Juan – pursed lips and poses that point to a masculinity he never inhabits comfortably – while Martínez's observant gaze positions her within the long line of child protagonists whose physical and emotional journey functions as the backbone of the film's narrative. The camera gives the viewer the perspective of a fellow traveller, the lens working at eye level to ensure a sense of intimacy as it captures the dynamics and tensions of the teenagers' evolving relationships. It dances alongside the laughing trio as they

party joyfully at a local fiesta by firelight; it observes Juan's furtive glances towards Chauk as Sara teaches him Spanish; it captures the expansive landscape from the roof of the train.

At every stage of the journey, the teenagers encounter hostility, danger, intimidation and harassment – they are arrested, slapped and handcuffed by police, dragged off a train and stripped of their belongings by a gang of thieves. Their position as children all too rarely inspires any kind of protective instinct in the adults they meet. There are occasional instances of kindness: fruit is thrown to them by farm workers; a man allows them safe passage through his house; a priest hands them a food package. But Quemada-Diez doesn't linger on these moments, presenting them instead just as respites along the way.

The bleakness of the protagonists' situation is underscored by Jacobo Lieberman and Leo Heiblum's music. At the end, a melancholy melodic line played by a solo cello brings the film full circle. In the opening moments we saw Juan picking up Samuel, who was eking out a living scavenging on a giant mound of rubbish. He ends the film undertaking a similar occupation, sweeping scraps from the floor of an American meat-packing plant. The irony isn't lost on the viewer but, as with so much else in this remarkable debut feature, the association is suggested rather than reinforced. In *The Golden Dream*, Quemada-Diez opts for the understated and allows gritty social realism to meet epic poetry in a tale in which the backstories of the manual labour underpinning California's economy are firmly positioned centre stage. 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Inna Payán
Luis Salinas
Edher Campos

Written by

Diego Quemada-Diez

Screenplay

Diego Quemada-Diez
Gibrán Portela
Lucía Carreras

Story

Diego Quemada-Diez

Director of

Photography

María Secco

Editing

Paloma López

Carrillo

Felipe Gómez

Production

Designer

Carlos Y. Jacques

Music

Jacobo Lieberman

Leonardo Heiblum

Sound Design

Matías Barberis

Costume Design

Nohemí González

©Cazador Solitario

Films, SA de CV

Production

Companies

A production of

Animal de Luz

Films, Machete

Producciones,

Instituto Mexicano

de Cinematografía,

Eficine, Castafiore

Films and

Kinemascope Films

Films Boutique,

Conaculta, Monex

Banco, Aalsea,

Programa Ibermedia,

Government of

Spain Ministerio de

Educación, Cultura

y Deporte, ICAA

Chiapas Gobierno

Estado, Estudios

Churubusco,

Bohemian

Foundation

CAST

Brandon López

Juan

Rodolfo Domínguez

Chauk

Karen Martínez

Sara

Carlos Chajon

Samuel

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo

Pictures Ltd

Mexican

theatrical title

La jaula de oro

Guatemala City, the present. Teenagers Juan, Sara and Samuel set off for the US border. To protect herself from male exploitation during the journey, Sara cuts her hair and takes on a new identity as 'Osvaldo'. Joined en route by Chauk, a Tzotzil Indian who speaks no Spanish, the friends are arrested and harassed by police. Samuel decides to return home but Juan and Sara go on to Mexico with Chauk. Juan resents Chauk's presence, particularly his interest in Sara. Sara is snatched by a gang of thieves who attack the train on which the trio are travelling. Chauk and Juan find themselves victims of a further scam, and Juan has to pay to secure Chauk's release. Despite encountering further adverse conditions, the pair furtively enter the US, where they are spotted by border police. Chauk is shot dead but Juan escapes. He is next seen working at a meat-packing plant, clearing debris from the floor.



Golden hour: López as Juan, with Domínguez as Chauk



Roman à clef: Emmanuelle Seigner as actress Vanda, with Polanski lookalike Mathieu Amalric as director Thomas

Venus in Fur

France/Poland 2013

Director: Roman Polanski

Certificate 15 95m 39s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

In their last film together, Roman Polanski cast his wife as the Whore of Babylon. Here she returns the favour, playing a jobbing actress attending a theatre audition and turning the tables on writer-director Thomas, played by Mathieu Amalric, standing in for Polanski, until he is utterly humiliated.

Amalric makes a good Polanski, that much we already know. Their resemblance is the stuff of legend. Polanski's son Elvis played Amalric's fictional younger self in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). On the cast list of that film was also Mrs Polanski – otherwise Emmanuelle Seigner, whom Polanski met through his casting director Dominique Besnehard more than 25 years ago in pre-production for *Pirates* (1986). But *Pirates* is just about the only film in the Polanski canon not referenced by *Venus in Fur*, which seems to involve nods to *The Tenant* (1976) in particular, but also *Cul-de-Sac* (1966), *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Tess* (1979), *Bitter Moon* (1992) and *Death and the Maiden* (1994). That said, this is Polanski's most simple and unalloyed film, a joyous two-hander and as near to a comedy as Polanski has ever been – bearing in mind his customary attraction to discomfort, panic and a nagging imminence of the sinister.

We open with the flicker of lightning on a

Parisian boulevard lined with trees and quite empty of people, with the camera gliding smoothly down the street before taking a right into a theatre, where a sign displays an audition notice for the play *Venus in Fur*. On stage we find Thomas animated and on the phone, noisily complaining to his girlfriend that the auditions have been a disaster, with a list of annoyances that doesn't quite add up – the actresses came wearing braces or speaking in squeaky voices: "Half looked like hookers, half like dykes," he grumbles. What's happened to real women these days? He could do a better job himself if he put on

a dress and high heels. The POV switches and we see that a woman has come into the auditorium – an actress, dressed in leather and wearing a dog-collar round her neck, her wet hair stuck to her skull, folding up a cheap umbrella. It's Seigner.

Initially it's clear that Thomas is disgusted by this apparition – she's ignorant, coarse, chews gum and blows bubbles, asks him enraging questions and totally misunderstands his purpose. But from the outset he's also puzzled by her – she somehow has a coffee-stained copy of his play, knows all the lines, and yet the supposed appointment made by her agent has



Stage-struck: Seigner and Amalric

somehow not made it on to his call-sheet (he never does ask who her agent is). Her name is Vanda, or so she claims – the same name as the main female character in his play. Speaking very forcefully he attempts to get her to leave; he wants to go home to his dinner (though we later gather no such dinner awaits him). But while he is distracted by another phone call from his girlfriend, Vanda has somehow changed into a period dress pulled out of her voluminous bag. Soon, through a combination of flattery and insolence on her part, he finds himself on the stage reading the role of the play's main protagonist, Severin. To his astonishment, this bawdy actress transforms herself immediately into a quiet and seductive lady of manners from the 1860s. By the end of their version of the play, he is wearing high heels and lipstick and has been tied by her to a stage prop.

Polanski's *Venus in Fur* is an adaptation of the Broadway play of the same name, adapted itself from the 1870 novella *Venus in Furs* by the Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Sacher-Masoch based his novella on his own experiences, so in this hall of mirrors, Polanski's film is a version of a version of a version of a life. The term masochism was coined after Sacher-Masoch's pathology. In his life and in his novella he defined a role that we would now recognise as a sexual submissive and a fetishist; he forms a relationship of abasement with a woman in which he is ritually humiliated by her, going on holiday to Italy and posing as her servant Gregor, for example, travelling in uniform in third class while she went first (the horror!). Masoch/Severin was sexually aroused by dominant women wearing furs of all kinds, following a childhood experience of being thrashed by an aunt and thrown on a fur coat as the deed took place, while approving servants watched. A great-great-uncle of Marianne Faithfull, he died insane, an undaunted furry freak.

Seigner and Polanski's last film together was *The Ninth Gate* (1999), in which Seigner plays a satanic seductress who grins horribly at examples of savagery ("I didn't know you had it in you," she says to Johnny Depp during a violent attack) and embodies all kinds of uncanny and unholy aspects, at one point floating down from a balcony in a rare example of supernatural actuality from this director. And although



Carry on Emmanuelle: Seigner as Vanda

Polanski has insisted that *Venus* is a comedy about the vanity of directors doing auditions and the S&M dynamic of the director hiring and controlling actors, and that he doesn't believe in the occult, there is nevertheless a touch of sulphur about Seigner's Vanda (agreeably she calls on God in an early scene, addressing him as 'Seigneur').

Her bag of tricks, which she brings in with her, seems like something from a Central European folktale, a bottomless bag. From it she pulls an 1870s dress very like ones seen in *Tess*, and a

Seigner is a demonic Greek goddess come to exact her revenge on a footling male who dares to approach and comment on the power of womankind

green dinner jacket, very similar to Polanski's in *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. From this bag seems to come the kitchen knife we last saw in *Rosemary's Baby* – held at one point to Amalric's throat – and the lipstick that was smeared crudely on the face of Donald Pleasence in *Cul-de-Sac*. From this bag too come long leather kinky boots, though it's her own high heels, which she has taken off and discarded, that she forces Thomas to wear, inevitably recalling the scene from *The Tenant* in which Polanski himself dons a dress and goes out to the balcony of his Paris flat, the distant windows and roofs changing fantastically in his mind into theatre boxes and stalls not dissimilar to the ones in *Venus in Fur*.

This is Polanski's second theatre adaptation in a row after *Carnage* (2011), and at the age of 80 he shows no signs of slowing down. It's easily his most enjoyable film for some time. Again working with cinematographer Pawel Edelman (like the film's composer Alexandre Desplat, a friend and regular collaborator), he uses one camera sparingly, with a dark stage and pools of light, embracing and playing with the idea of theatre lighting. Sound is used minimally and beautifully (adding a clink to invisible cups that Thomas and Vanda are pretending to use on stage) and the music itself often undercuts and recontextualises the apparently sinister elements on show; Desplat's East European/Greek medley during the final dance, in which Seigner is naked but swathed in a long fur stole (where did that come from?), creates a kind of mad carnival and fairground feel in something that would otherwise be a spectacle of horror – she is a demonic Greek goddess come to exact her revenge on a footling male who dares to approach and comment on the power of womankind. She is Robert Graves's White Goddess, a Jungian entity of formidable strength, a pagan, as she indeed calls herself at the end. How much further will her vengeance go? We glide out of the theatre the way we came before this is revealed, but one suspects it will not be too savage. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Benmussa
Alain Sarde
Screenplay
David Ives
Roman Polanski
Based on a play
by David Ives
**Director of
Photography**
Pawel Edelman

Editing
Margot Meynier
Hervé de Luze
Art Direction
Jean Rabasse
**Music Composed
and Conducted by**
Alexandre Desplat
Sound
Lucien Balibar
Costumes

Dinah Collin
©R.P. Productions,
Monolith Films
**Production
Companies**
Alain Sarde and
Robert Benmussa
present an R.P.
Productions/Monolith
Films co-production

With the participation
of the Polish
Film Institute
In association
with Manon 3 and
Mars Films and
the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+
A Roman Polanski film

CAST
Emmanuelle Seigner
Vanda
Mathieu Amalric
Thomas
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World
8,608ft +8 frames
French theatrical title
*La Vénus à la
fourrure*

Paris, the present. After a day of fruitless auditioning on stage at a Paris playhouse, director-playwright Thomas is on the phone complaining to his girlfriend about the quality of the 35 actresses he has just seen. With a dress and a pair of high heels he could do better himself, he says. Unseen by Thomas, a woman enters the auditorium, apologising for being late. She introduces herself as 'Vanda', the same name as the character in the play that Thomas has adapted from the 1870 novella by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Thomas is unable to find her name on the schedule. Through a combination of flattery and firmness, she somehow ends up on stage doing the audition.

Initially quite hostile to this vulgar woman, Thomas slowly falls under her spell. The lines of the play become indistinguishable from their own elaborate game-playing. Every now and then Vanda interrupts to exclaim that the text is sexist. At one point she puts a knife to Thomas's throat. She seems to know a lot about him, and claims to be a private detective doing a moral audit on him for his girlfriend. He crumbles. She puts a dog collar on him, lipstick and women's shoes, and ties him to a prop. All the lights go out. She returns as a nude, Greek-speaking goddess draped in furs, and dances round him. She has triumphed. The camera moves back, and out of the theatre.

Aatsinki The Story of Arctic Cowboys

Finland 2013
Director: Jessica Oreck



Scene and herd: *Aatsinki*

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

'Minimalist' is the word that immediately springs to mind when watching the latest documentary feature by Jessica Oreck, whose idiosyncratic *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* (2009) explored Japan's relationship with the insect world. If that earlier film courted accusations of putting an exotic sheen on its subject matter with its rather essentialist view of Japanese culture, her portrait of reindeer-herding brothers Aarne and Lasse Aatsinki instead proffers a *reductio ad absurdum* interpretation of documentary observational realism that runs the risk of prompting accusations of sheer artlessness among the less patient.

The accompanying press notes emphasise how the brothers' story "raises weighty questions about what it means to live with the land, and invites audience members to reconsider their own assumptions about technology, food production and, most critically, man's place in nature". However, there's little of that fuel for thought provided within the film itself to steer one towards such meditations, beyond the visible evidence provided by the passing of the seasons, and certainly no real sense of any line of argument that engages with these themes.

The film unfolds as a collage of isolated moments from the quotidian routines of its subjects as if witnessed through a telescope,

with the onus of interpretation placed squarely on the viewer. Oreck's eschewal of onscreen text or expository voiceover to introduce the characters and situate them within a particular context, or even the emotive guidance of a soundtrack, might well be justified as a rejection of cinematic artifice, but it is a frustrating artistic choice nonetheless. An online resource, 'The Aatsinki Season', has been prepared as a companion to the film, but one is left wishing for a stronger sense of orientation within the primary window of the onscreen world itself.

The contrast between the mechanical efficiency of the abattoir sequences of reindeers being hung, flayed and butchered and the scenes of the taciturn, forest-loving herders roasting river fish over open fires or whittling away at pieces of wood betrays Oreck's models: Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Our Daily Bread* (2005) and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's *Sweetgrass* (2009) and *Leviathan* (2012, co-directed with Véréna Paravel). Sensory immersion is clearly the goal, but for a film that purports to be about man's place within his broader environment, *Aatsinki* mainly suffers from a lack of engagement with its subjects.

Nevertheless, it is in the depiction of human elements overwhelmed by the immensity of their landscape that the film impresses, as the mists, muddy browns and copper tones of autumn cede to the undulating alien snowscapes of winter. Here Oreck's unembellished approach veers closer to the realms of experimental cinema, yielding such memorable images as a swarm of mosquitoes suspended in the haze of late-summer dusk, a dazzling display of the aurora borealis, and a bird's-eye view of the reindeer as they are herded by helicopter, weaving through the pines like tiny grey ants.

But despite its moments of beauty, *Aatsinki: The Story of Arctic Cowboys* is ultimately a cold and unedifying slog compared with more fabricated takes on life on the fringes of civilisation such as Sarah Gavron and David Katznelson's portrait of the remote Greenland community in *Village at the End of the World* (2012), or the numerous works by Werner Herzog that fit the bill. **S**

The Art of the Steal

Canada/USA 2013
Director: Jonathan Sobol

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

A likeable second-rank cast and a neatly accomplished genre workout have proved an endearing combination in many a B-picture of yore, and this modest caper flick promises more of the same. Or at least it would do, if it were any good.

Sadly, Canadian writer-director Jonathan Sobol never quite decides how seriously he's taking the proceedings, so his would-be fiendish plot design is undermined by a cavalier attitude to credibility, and the central conflict between good-egg old lag Kurt Russell and his untrustworthy sibling Matt Dillon counts for very little when the elaborate theft on which the story turns never seems real enough to matter – or clever enough to dazzle us instead.

Dillon struggles in the circumstances, unsure whether to play his haplessly dodgy character for laughs; Russell coasts his way through manly banter and chase sequences alike; and the ever-reliable Terence Stamp, here playing a forger-turned-police adviser, provides an isolated moment of genuine class with a sweetly delivered recollection of childhood visits to the V&A. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nicholas D. Tabarrok
Written by
Jonathan Sobol
Director of Photography
Adam Swica
Film Editor
Geoff Ashenhurst
Production Designer
Matthew Davies
Original Music
Grayson Matthews
Sound Mixer
Rob Turi
Costume Designer
Brenda Broer

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Dimension Films
and Alliance Films
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Produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada, Astral - Harold Greenberg Fund, Ontario Media Development

Corporation Produced in association with The Movie Network - an Astral Media Network, Movie Central - a Corus Entertainment Company with the assistance of the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Jeff Sackman
Bob Weinstein
Mark Slone
Noah Segal

Agent Bick
Terence Stamp
Samuel Winter
Matt Dillon
Nicky Calhoun
Devon Bostick
Ponch
Stephen McHattie
Dirty Ernie
Joe Pingue
Carmen
Alan C. Peterson
Reverend Herman
Headly
Dax Ravina
Sunny

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

CAST

Kurt Russell
Crunch Calhoun
Jay Baruchel
Francie Tobin
Katheryn Winnick
Lola
Chris Diamantopoulos
Guy De Cornet
Kenneth Welsh
Uncle Paddy
MacCarthy
Jason Jones

Poland, 2005. Professional thief Crunch Calhoun is jailed after his gang (which includes his brother Nicky) botches a scam involving a fake Gauguin painting. When the police intervene, Nicky grasses on Crunch to save his own skin.

Seven years later, after Crunch is released, he and Nicky reluctantly collaborate on a new scheme to reunite the old gang and steal a priceless medieval book. As they target the US-Canadian border post where it's held, they attract the attention of Interpol agent Bick, who is being advised by former forger Terence Winter. Crunch and his team successfully throw Bick and Winter off the scent and steal the book, so that their own expert forger Guy can make copies and sell them for \$1 million each. Funding this leaves Nicky out of pocket. The whole scheme is revealed to have been a ruse cooked up by Crunch and the others to teach Nicky a lesson.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-produced by
Rachael Teel
Jari Etelälahti
Re-recording Mixer
Kevin Wilson

Production Company
A film by Jessica Oreck
In Colour

[1.85:1] Subtitles
Distributor
November Films

A documentary about reindeer herders in Finnish Lapland, far north of the Arctic Circle. The film observes a year in the life of brothers Aarne and Lasse Aatsinki and their families, contrasting the herders' reliance on modern technologies – such as snowmobiles, helicopters and the abattoir where the meat is processed – with a more timeless and simple way of life connected to the landscape and the livestock.

Bastards

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Deborah Perkin
Certificate 12A 82m 52s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

At first glance this study of single mothers in Morocco, battling for legal recourse to escape the stigma attached to them and their illegitimate offspring, comes across like an extended TV current-affairs report instead of a feature doc meriting a theatrical showcase.

A mixture of on-the-spot interviews and location footage outlines the plight of an illiterate migrant worker, Rabha, whose situation we take as emblematic of those Moroccan women battling against the prevailing social values that regard them as outcasts. Family pressure forced Rabha into a tribal marriage with her mute cousin at the age of 14, where she endured rape and sexual violence before returning pregnant to her parents. Her traditional union has no legal status, however, and without family registration her daughter Salma has been denied schooling. Help is at hand, though, since the charity l'Association Solidarité Féminine exists to intervene in such cases, and the Moroccan government's commendable 2004 revision of Islamic law now provides for the recognition of a single mother's rights where marriage and paternity can be proven.

As veteran BBC producer Deborah Perkin's first film unfolds, uncertainty over whether Rabha will be able to force her errant husband into court, and indeed whether the all-male judges will decide in her favour, sustains the drama over the 83-minute running time. There are also sidelong glances towards other single women – including a long-time mistress wanting recognition for her daughter, and an older lady distressed that



Wrong arm of the law: *Bastards*

illegitimacy could hinder the career path of the son she's slaved to put through law school.

The visuals are, it has to be said, slightly on the scruffy side, the fierce Moroccan light evidently no friend to digital video cameras, though Perkin's extended narrative eventually marks the film apart from a similarly themed segment you might catch on *Newsnight* of an evening. But it's the filmmaker's extensive, time-consuming groundwork in building trust with her subjects and immersing herself in their world that distinguishes this from small-screen in-out reportage assignments. Trust and understanding are key elements in observational documentary and they can't really be faked. Here, in the course of filming, we can see Rabha's initial hesitancy on screen giving way to an affectingly unguarded quality, compellingly drawing the viewer into complicity with this courageous young woman. By the same token, Perkin's feeling for the material clearly also develops over time, so her camera intuitively picks out apparently secondary individuals – such as Rabha's seemingly cowed mother and the bitterly misogynist father of her abusive husband – whose demeanour not only speaks volumes about the progress still to be made in Morocco's battle of the sexes but also registers as such without the need for editorial underlining. These moments seem to flow naturally out of the ongoing conflict, but they're emotional and thematic grace-notes the filmmaker really has to earn.

On the whole, *Bastards* is somewhat functional in form – but stylistic flash is not the imperative here. Instead it's genuinely refreshing to see a story about female empowerment from the Islamic world, one that values the resilience of put-upon single mothers and the defiance of civil-rights organisations yet also gives due credit to the comparative progressiveness of the Moroccan legal system. A keenly thought-through, sensitively executed, dramatically involving debut, it shows that Perkin certainly put her BBC redundancy payment to worthwhile use in getting production rolling. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Deborah Perkin	Paul Jefferies Darran Clement	Executive Producers Peter Grimsdale Angela Holdsworth Adam Partridge
Written by Deborah Perkin	@Deborah Perkin Media Ltd	
Filed by Deborah Perkin	Production Companies A Deborah Perkin Media Ltd	In Colour [1.78:1]
Editors Jane Greenwood Amanda McGregor	production Supported by the Film Agency for Wales	Subtitles
Music Composed by Debbie Wiseman		Distributor Deborah Perkin Media Ltd
Sound Editors		

An observational documentary examining the legal and societal status of illegitimate children in Morocco, where single mothers and their offspring are commonly treated as outcasts. One example is Rabha El Haimer, an illiterate migrant worker from a rural background who at 14 was forced into a traditional marriage with a mute cousin. Raped by her new husband, she returned home to her parents and gave birth to a baby girl. Her daughter was subsequently denied official education because Rabha's now-dissolved union had no validity in law.

Rabha turns to the Casablanca-based charity l'Association Solidarité Féminine, which offers advice and legal assistance (the Moroccan regime amended Islamic law in 2004 to recognise women's rights in such situations). Women such as long-time mistress Fatiha Rabbah continue to struggle for recognition and support from their male lovers, but in Rabha's case an ASF lawyer compels her former husband's family to appear in court and wins a ruling in her favour, thanks to the help of male villagers who testify to their attendance at the wedding.

Life remains a struggle for Rabha, who works in a café kitchen, but she is overjoyed that her daughter, now with official registration, has begun to attend school.

Battle Company: Korengal

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Sebastian Junger
Certificate 15 84m 20s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

One of the most acclaimed recent documentaries about contentious conflicts, Sebastian Junger and Tim Hetherington's *Restrepo* (2010) gained much of its potency from the fact that it gave a grunt's-eye view of war, deliberately offering next to nothing in terms of wider context. It initially seems as though Junger's quasi-sequel is going to fill some gaps – it begins with scene-setting NBC news footage of the US army's abandonment of Afghanistan's Korengal Valley in 2010 – but it rapidly becomes clear that although the subjects it tackles are more generalised than those of *Restrepo*, and there's less of an immediate narrative focus, it occupies very similar territory, and many of the interviewees will already be familiar. (As before, studio-shot interviews are intercut with handheld footage of combat operations and occasional conversations filmed in the field.)

Junger's aim, once again, is to capture the day-to-day experience of war as narrated exclusively by its frontline participants. This time, broad-brush themes are bounced from interviewee to interviewee, with vivid individual recollections building into a comprehensive group portrait: reactions have to be instant when bullets start flying, and tactical awareness is vital even under conditions that would reduce most people to gibbering wrecks. (Specialist Kyle Steiner affirms: "I scan my guys 100 times during a three-minute firefight.") There's plenty of gallows humour: Sergeant Brendan O'Byrne refers to the topography of the Korengal Valley as being "sports heaven, if they just stopped shooting at us", while the gloom of the funeral service for PFC Juan Restrepo (after whom their observation post was named) is unexpectedly enlivened by his own choice of memorial music, an incongruously upbeat flamenco arrangement of 'I Will Survive'.

In his *S&S* review of *Restrepo* (November 2010), Guy Westwell noted that "there



The bog of war: *Battle Company: Korengal*

is little record here of the casual racism and misogyny that are typical of military culture – and this remains broadly true here, although Specialist Sterling Jones describes what it's like being the only black man in the platoon and one of just five in the company (including two cooks): “I get plenty of shit around here as the only black dude, but 98 per cent of the time it's all in good fun.” (He doesn't say what happens during the remaining 2 per cent.) The new film also returns briefly to one of the more contentious areas documented by *Restrepo*: the mutual distrust displayed between Americans and Afghans during the weekly ‘shura’ meetings, one of which is interrupted here by an impassioned declaration from a villager that if his voice isn't heard he'll go to Jalalabad or Kabul and publicly immolate himself. (We are not told whether this threat is carried out.)

Women remain almost entirely absent, bar occasional glimpses of girly magazines and passing references to mothers, wives and girlfriends, usually in the context of their inability to understand the intensity of the camaraderie between people who regularly have to save each other's lives. Accordingly, a section on whiling away the time between Taliban assaults (card games, videogames, six-hour discussions about who would win hypothetical celebrity fighting bouts – George Clooney seems a hot tip) segues into the practice of tattooing or similarly memorialising roll-calls of fallen comrades, the topic of the sudden death or maiming of either oneself or an immediate neighbour permeating almost every discussion, as does the definition of ‘bravery’ itself.

These issues must have weighed heavily on Junger's mind throughout production, since his own former colleague Tim Hetherington was fatally shot in 2011 while covering the Libya conflict. Although the new film is not as overt a tribute as Junger's 2013 documentary *Which Way Is the Front Line from Here?*, Hetherington rightly retains the lead cinematographer credit, and a simple portrait of him at the very end, unmarked by labels or printed dedication, is movingly understated. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nick Quested
Cinematography
Tim Hetherington
Sebastian Junger
Edited by
Michael Levine
Music
Composed by
Marty Beller
Re-recording Mixer

Andy Kris
©Battle Films, LLC
Production Companies
Goldcrest Films
presents in
association with
Outpost Films
In Colour

**[L78:1]
Part-subtitled**
Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

Soldiers from Battle Company, Second Platoon of the 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, US Army, discuss their 15-month tour of duty in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley in 2007-08. The subjects tackled include the disproportionate number of Taliban attacks, the experience of being shot at, maintaining discipline under fire, the peculiar challenges of Afghan terrain, favourite weapons, the adrenaline rush of a firefight and the loss of comrades (including PFC Juan Restrepo, after whom their observation post was named).

Belle

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Amma Asante
Certificate 12A 104m 17s



Heart of justice: Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Sam Reid

See Feature
on page 30

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

When Captain Sir John Lindsay returns to his young daughter Dido Belle after the death of her mother, a former slave, he proffers his love and care in the form of chocolate. This small gift represents a greater one: Lindsay recognises Dido as the legitimate heir to his name and fortune – a singular act in 1769 Britain, which, as the opening titles remind us, was “a colonial empire and slave trading centre”. The sweet mixture of sugar and cocoa from the colonies that Lindsay gives to his daughter is like the film's use of costume drama: simultaneously drawing the viewer in and critiquing the ‘chocolate box’ style of the genre and its literary sources by revealing the bitter ingredients on which they depend.

The film opens with young Dido being laced into a corset; director Amma Asante neither casts out costume drama's textural, architectural beauty in favour of the gritty approach of her first feature *A Way of Life* (2004), nor casts it at odds with a protagonist of colour. Rather, as the film's title implies, beauty flows from and around Dido. With grace and assurance, Gugu Mbatha-Raw's performance as the adult Dido centres the film, as vividly mobile as the depiction of the historical Dido Lindsay and her cousin Elizabeth Murray in the portrait, attributed to Johann Zoffany, that inspired the film. The painting is reputedly the first to depict a black subject sharing an equal eyeline with a white subject.

While putting Dido front and centre, Asante highlights the female relationships that are key to the genre, not only between the two cousins

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Damian Jones
Written by
Misan Sagay
Director of Photography
Ben Smithard
Editor
Pia Di Ciulla
Victoria Boydell
Production Designer
Simon Bowles
Music
Rachel Portman
Production Sound Mixer
Alistair Crocker

Costume Designer
Anushia Nieradzki
©Twentieth Century
Fox Film Corporation,
The British Film
Institute and TSG
Entertainment
Finance LLC (in all
territories except
Brazil, Italy, Japan,
Korea and Spain)
©TCF Hungary Film
Rights Exploitation
Limited Liability
Company, Twentieth
Century Fox Film

Corporation,
The British Film
Institute and TSG
Entertainment
Finance LLC (in
Brazil, Italy, Japan,
Korea and Spain)
Production Companies
Fox Searchlight
Pictures, Isle of Man
Film and Pinewood
Pictures and BFI
present in association
with Head Gear
Films and Metrol
Technology a DJ

Films production
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Released in
association with
TSG Entertainment
Executive Producers
Steve Christian
Julie Goldstein
Ivan Dunleavy
Steve Norris
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross
Christopher Collins

CAST

Gugu Mbatha-Raw
Dido Elizabeth Belle
Tom Wilkinson
Lord Mansfield
Sam Reid
John Davinier
Sarah Gadon
Lady Elizabeth Murray
Miranda Richardson
Lady Ashford
Penelope Wilton
Lady Mary Murray
Tom Felton
James Ashford
James Norton
Oliver Ashford

Matthew Goode
Captain Sir
John Lindsay
Emily Watson
Lady Mansfield
Alex Jennings
Lord Ashford
Bethan Mary-James
Mabel

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

London, 1769. Captain Sir John Lindsay gives his name and fortune to Dido Belle, his daughter by a former slave, and makes her a ward of his uncle and aunt, Lord and Lady Mansfield, at Kenwood House. When Dido comes of age, Lord Mansfield makes her chatelaine of the house, discouraging her from seeking a suitor, despite her independent wealth. However, Mansfield's colleague at the King's Bench, Lord Ashford, is greedy for wealth and determines that his son Oliver will marry Dido; his other son James flirts cruelly with Dido's disinherited


cousin Elizabeth. Dido accepts Oliver's proposal to defy her uncle, but at the same time she is also defying him by associating with his former clerk John Davinier. The latter is critical of his former employer's handling of the 'Zong' case, concerning slavers who threw slaves overboard their ship, the 'Zong'. Dido falls in love with Davinier and identifies passionately with the fate of the slaves on the 'Zong'. She hands a crucial testimony to Davinier, which leads Mansfield to find against the slavers and support her match with Davinier.

but also with the older women – their great-aunts Lady Mansfield and Lady Mary Murray, and the family's London maid Mabel – who mother the motherless girls. As the film transforms the young Dido and Elizabeth into their older selves with an apparently seamless shot of them running around a tree, it also nods to the maze in Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992) and through it to a matrilineage of critical heritage dramas by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Julie Dash, Jane Campion, Patricia Rozema, Mira Nair and Andrea Arnold.

As in those films, in a clever twist on the Bechdel test, Asante shows that it is through talking about marriage and men that the female protagonists of costume drama are able to articulate a political philosophy, culminating here when Elizabeth states: "We are but their property." Through the cousins' entanglement with the socially superior but spendthrift Ashford family, Asante frankly depicts the classist, racist and sexist violence that contours the romantic fantasy. Dido's insistence, even in the face of Oliver Ashford's self-interested proposal and his brother James's attempted sexual assault, that she is entitled to romance revivifies love as a structuring principle for her story, as does her eventual choice of beau. The son of a poor parish priest, John Davinier is a radical abolitionist clerking for Dido's great-uncle Lord Mansfield, and the first person to see Dido as embodying her mother's beauty rather than her father's wealth.

When Davinier reveals to Dido the facts of the *Zong* case, on which Mansfield is sitting, she risks participation in a public as well as an intimate drama. The story of the *Zong* – a slave traders' ship whose captain had his human cargo thrown overboard when supplies of water ran low – shocks Dido into a realisation of her anomalous position and its privileges. Making use of them, she hands Davinier papers that Mansfield has suppressed, in which the *Zong*'s first mate confesses the slaves were thrown overboard as an insurance scam.

This inextricable intertwining of love and justice, private and public, personal and political, is the film's great *cri de coeur* and its structural brilliance, as costume and courtroom drama comment on, and merge into, each other. The film argues that Mansfield's judgement, which found against the slavers and historically marked the beginning of the end of British slavery, must have been affected by the presence – forceful and articulate here – of his ward. Following her pivotal role in her great-uncle's change of heart, Dido's proposal to Davinier outside the Inns of Court after Mansfield's verdict is akin to Cornel West's assertion that "justice is what love looks like in public."


"I have been blessed with freedom twice over, as a Negro and as a woman," Dido tells Davinier, drawing an implicit line between the 18th century's revolutionary notions of individual liberty and the civil-rights movements of the 20th. While Dido means, on the surface, that her legitimacy and inheritance have freed her from the constraints of her skin colour and gender, the statement suggests an exhilarating realisation: that it is from her marginalised position that she (and we) can have our chocolate and eat it, revelling in the film's gorgeous awareness of what freedom truly means. 

Blended

Director: Frank Coraci
Certificate 12A 117m 3s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Fathers know nothing about bringing up daughters and mothers know nothing about bringing up sons. That's the message of this comedy starring Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore as mismatched single parents who unite more because of this theory than for any obvious attraction. After Jim (Sandler) has schooled Lauren (Barrymore) in the masturbatory habits of adolescent boys and she has explained the vagaries of tampons, the pair end up on holiday with their respective children, where more lessons follow: teenage girls like to wear dresses and makeup, boys enjoy a bit of rough and tumble, and so on.

It's broad in its humour and simplistic in its sketch of the 'blended' family, but the script offers a few witty moments and Barrymore has charm to spare. It's also easy to buy Sandler as a jock father who calls his sports-loving daughter Hilary 'Larry'. But for every moment that reminds you of Sandler's better films – including *The Wedding Singer*, also directed by Frank Coraci – there's one that recalls *Grown Ups* all too vividly. 

Drew Barrymore,
Adam Sandler



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mike Karz
Adam Sandler
Jack Giarraputo

Written by
Ivan Menchell
Clare Sera

Director of Photography
Julio Macat

Editor
Tom Costain

Production Designer
Perry Andelin Blake

Music
Rupert Gregson-Williams

Sound Mixer
Richard Kite
Costume Designer
Christine Wada

Production Companies
Warner Bros
Pictures presents a
Gulfstream Pictures,
Happy Madison
production
A Frank Coraci movie
Executive Producers
Barry Bernardi
Josie Rosen
Tim Herlihy
Allen Covert
Steve Koren

CAST

Adam Sandler
Jim
Drew Barrymore
Lauren
Kevin Nealon

Eddy
Terry Crews
Nickens
Wendi McLendon-Covey
Jen
Joel McHale
Mark
Jessica Lowe
Ginger
Bella Thorne
Hilary, 'Larry'

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

US, the present. Divorcee Lauren and widower Jim go on a blind date but it is not a success. Lauren's friend Jen is dating Jim's boss; unwilling to meet his children, she cancels a holiday with them at the last minute. Hearing that the holiday is up for grabs, both Lauren and Jim offer to take it. Soon Lauren and her two sons and Jim and his two daughters are reluctantly sharing a holiday in an African resort for 'blended' families – primarily those made from second marriages. Over the course of the holiday, Lauren and Jim warm to each other. However, he panics and leaves a romantic dinner early, feeling unready for a relationship.

Back in the US, Jim goes to find Lauren, only to discover her ex-husband at her house while she is out. Lauren later explains that she is still single; they kiss.

Brick Mansions

Director: Camille Delamarre

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Ostensibly social science fiction and ostensibly jaw-dropping action-cash-cow thrillingness, this Hollywoodisation of Luc Besson's *Banlieue 13* franchise turns out to be hardly a satisfying measure of either. Recycling has its costs, at least for anyone who might read a review and who isn't sold entirely on trailers filled with stunts that may or may not be CGIed into possibility. Indeed, if you doubt that David Belle's parkour acrobatics are all 100 per cent genuine – that, specifically, a \$28 million production and its insurers would allow its franchise star to jump off rooftops – then the project's *raison d'être* vanishes in a wisp of virtual perspiration.

Which doesn't subtract from Belle's Olga Korbut-like uneven-bars gymnastic prowess, which depends entirely on a convenient ladder rung or exposed pipe, all the better to swing himself over adversaries' heads and/or through an also conveniently open window. Visible here as something Belle can 'do', it's as much an edit-and-effects fantasy as any vintage Hong Kong star's martial-arts choreography.

Which leaves the usual suspects: story, character and theme, which are all predictably neglected here. Adapting the *Banlieue 13* story straight, with the puppy-eyed Belle in the same role, Besson and erstwhile action editor/first-time director Camille Delamarre transpose the Parisian ghetto to a lawless chunk of Detroit, now walled off and run by criminals. Into the bees' nest plunges Belle's sakinative convict-cum-*danseur* Lino (for the sake of a kidnapped old girlfriend) and determined young superstar cop Damien (Paul Walker, in one of several posthumous performances in the pipeline), whose mission is to shut down a neutron bomb hijacked by the gangs. Both are after cultured and philosophical drug kingpin Tremaine (Wu-Tang 



Tricks and mortar: David Belle

Clan leader RZA), who runs the Brick Mansions community in much the same late-capitalist fashion RZA has run Wu-Tang.

You'd love to tip the hat towards the sci-fi conversion of France's and the US's urban immigrant ghetto crisis into a full-on dystopian scenario – Detroit has been in a notoriously near-apocalyptic state of collapse – but, like its precedents, *Brick Mansions* is feeding the mob only, straining for action-visual fireworks with every beat. (Any brief scene of dumb expository dialogue can get you salivating for a real movie.) The problem is, the action is bogus – every sequence, even Belle just climbing a ladder, is shot and/or modulated afterwards with the popular high-speed shutter-strobe effect, which makes it virtually impossible to focus on what's happening physically, or even say with any confidence that you saw anything happen at all. To say that Delamarre's stylistic choice here is overkill avoids the real problem: it absolutely defeats the purpose of Belle's athletic deftness but it also resorts to ocular confusion when clarity should be the aim. It's a bullshit approximation of action filmmaking, as far from the thing itself as Besson's late-career merchandising is from his still-fascinating early movies. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Claude Leger
Jonathan Vanger
Screenwriter
Luc Besson
Based on the screenplay *Barlèue 13* written by Luc Besson, Bibi Naceri
Director of Photography
Cristophe Collette
Editors
Carlo Rizzo
Arthur Tarnowski
Production Designer
Jean A. Carriere
Sound
Donald Cohen
Marie-Claude Gagne
Frederic Dubois
Dominic Despins
Didier Lozahic
Costume Designer
Julia Patkos
Stunt Co-ordinator
Alex Cadieux
Production Companies
Relativity Media and Europacorp present

a Europacorp-Transfilm International Inc. co-production, a French-Canadian co-production with participation of Canal+, DB and Cine+
Executive Producers
Ryan Kavanaugh
Tucker Tooley
Matt Alvarez
Romuald Drault
Ginette Guillard
Henri Deneubourg

CAST

Paul Walker
Damien Collier
David Belle
Lino Dupree
Rza
Tremaine Alexander
Gouchy Boy
K2
Catalina Denis
Lola
Carlo Rota
George the Greek

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros Distributors (UK)

Detroit, the near future. Brick Mansions, a lawless section of the city, has been walled off and left to go feral. Community activist Lino violates drug lord Tremaine's turf by stealing and disposing of a load of heroin, precipitating the kidnapping of Lino's ex-girlfriend, whom Lino must now rescue. At the same time, young cop Damien is sent in undercover to find and defuse a neutron bomb that Tremaine's henchmen have stolen and accidentally triggered. Tremaine threatens to explode the bomb outside Brick Mansions, blowing up Detroit, if he's not paid a ransom the city can't afford. Lino and Damien discover that the bomb's deactivation code is fake – the authorities mean the bomb to wipe the ghetto clean. Lino and Damien band together with Tremaine and confront the city's corrupt mayor, recording his confession for TV news.

Camille Claudel 1915

France 2013
Director: Bruno Dumont



Asylum speaker: Juliette Binoche

See Feature on page 42

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Camille Claudel 1915 depicts three days in the life of the sculptor when she was a virtual prisoner at the Mistral-whipped Montdevergues asylum in Montfavet, in south-eastern France. It thus continues two years after Bruno Nuytten's *Camille Claudel* (1988) concluded with images of Camille peering through the window bars of a van carrying her to the Ville-Evrard psychiatric hospital east of Paris – consigned there by her mother and brother Paul – and a photograph of her taken at Montdevergues in March 1929 when she was 65. Whereas Nuytten's film was a floridly melodramatic (if watchable) showcase for Isabelle Adjani at her most passionate, this

later history of Claudel, which stars Juliette Binoche, is spare, harsh and minimalistic, as one would expect from Bruno Dumont.

Dumont being Dumont, however, his probing of Camille's purgatory in middle age does not lack for what some observers might regard as a typical shock tactic. Whereas his *La vie de Jésus* (1997), *Humanité* (1999), *Twentynine Palms* (2003) and *Flandres* (2006) viscerally depict sex – both as a subject of mystery and as a weapon men use against women – *Camille Claudel 1915* actualises the flailings of the mind. To replicate the cruelty of Camille's incarceration and her suffering and endurance as a fully conscious asylum inmate, Dumont filmed Binoche acting with real psychiatric patients, several of whom are intellectually and

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Jean Bréhat
Rachid Bouchareb
Muriel Merlin
Screenplay
Bruno Dumont
Based on the works and correspondence of Paul and Camille Claudel and Camille Claudel's medical records
Director of Photography

Guillaume Deffontaines
Editors
Bruno Dumont
Basile Belkhir
Art Director
Riton Dupire-Clément
Sound
Philippe Lecoœur
Costumes
Alexandra Charles
Brigitte Massay-Sersour

©3B Productions/
Arte France Cinéma
Production Companies
3B Productions in co-production with Arte France Cinéma, CRRV Nord-Pas de Calais, Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains
With the participation of Arte France, Canal+, Ciné+, Centre

National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée
With the support of Région Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur, Région Nord-Pas de Calais in partnership with CNC
Developed with the support of Cinéma 6 Développement

CAST

Juliette Binoche
Camille Claudel
Jean-Luc Vincent
Paul Claudel
Robert Leroy
doctor
Emmanuel Kauffman
priest
Marion Keller
Mlle Blanc
Alexandra Lucas

Mlle Lucas

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Camille Claudel, committed by her brother Paul to a psychiatric hospital in suburban Paris in 1913, is moved to the Montdevergues asylum near Avignon following the outbreak of WWI. Though the 50-year-old sculptor demonstrates symptoms of paranoia, she is sane, lucid and reflective. The supervising nuns entrust her with keeping an eye on the asylum's more severely afflicted female inmates. Deprived of her vocation, Camille is depressed and bored. The resident doctor cheers her with news that Paul plans to visit her. She joins in a desultory walk in the hills but is too demoralised to finish the meagre artworks she attempts. She tells the doctor that her mother and sister have abandoned her and

that Auguste Rodin, her former mentor and lover, is conspiring to seize her studio, notebooks and sketches. The doctor mentions that her relationship with Rodin ended some 20 years before.

Paul travels to see Camille, telling himself that her delusions of grandeur and persecution mania stem from her pride and contempt for others. He boasts to a priest about his self-abnegating faith in God. His visit is brief. He rigidly resists Camille's embrace, and claims that her incarceration is part of God's plan. On leaving, he tells the doctor how easily artists can become unhinged. The doctor says that Camille's wish to live alone near Paris should be granted. A title reports that she spent her remaining 29 years at Montdevergues.

Chef

USA/United Kingdom/Russia 2014

Director: Jon Favreau

Certificate 15 114m 27s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Chef is a poorly crafted dramedy with a rote father-son reconciliation act – but as a document of some aspects of the current American food scene it's spot-on. Bad news first: writer/director/star Jon Favreau opened the Marvel Comics Universe for film business with the first two *Iron Man* pictures and appears to be exceptionally defensive about that now. *Iron Man 2* (2010) was a tough experience, with much interference from Marvel higher-ups, and the once nominally indie-minded *Swingers* screenwriter/*Made* director is ostensibly restoring his street cred with *Chef* (before returning to the corporate fray – a new, doubtless expensive *Jungle Book* adaptation is scheduled next).

The first act hardly requires metaphorical unpacking: Carl Casper (Favreau) made his name in Miami ten years ago as an adventurous chef but now works in a neighbourhood restaurant in LA, cranking out the same menu night after night as dictated by owner Riva (Dustin Hoffman), who decries Casper's longing to serve "arty shit". Casper quits in a fit of pique after his unimaginative staples incur the acerbically worded wrath of food blogger Ramsey Michel (Oliver Platt). When Casper wonders if he still has "anything left to say", he sounds decidedly more like a frustrated, long-out-of-touch director than a chef.

This opening portion is tediously self-reflexive and the film is visually sloppy throughout. Matters improve, however, when Casper is gifted with a food truck by his ex-wife's other ex (an excuse for a one-scene Robert Downey Jr cameo) and takes to the road with loyal line cook Martin (John Leguizamo) and long-neglected son Percy (Emjay Anthony). As in many family films of the past 20 years or so, neglected Percy is sad that he's so often his busy dad's last priority but, as he says, he's "used to it". Parent and child bond when Percy helps to organise Carl's social-media campaign, drawing hordes to the truck with a relentless Twitter barrage (there's an animation of a flying mass of blue Twitter birds as buzz builds), supplemented with Vine and Facebook posts. This is quite obviously a film made by a successful studio director who's had the importance of social media reluctantly beaten into him.

If the constant dialogue about Twitter and so on starts as a wearisome hangover from Favreau's Hollywood duties, it makes sense divorced from that context: that's how food trucks gather crowds. Favreau sharpened his culinary skills for the movie, training under LA food-truck pioneer Roy Kogi (who brought Korean tacos to the city's streets) and spending a lot of time getting the physical aspects of his role right. This commitment to verisimilitude is evident not just in his opening display of knife skills while slicing a courgette at top speed but also in the cramped kitchen layouts, strong sense of all-hours work ethic and the demonstrable lack of time for a personal life. There are a number of scenes of Favreau solo cooking, and if they're not start-to-finish instructional demonstrations, the ingredients, steps and final outcomes are all clear. (These scenes are admittedly overegged by excitable salsa music and similar cues, in a misguided attempt to pep up this essentially meditative process.) Befitting his preferences as both eater and director, big cuts of meat are the presentational centre: this food porn avoids potentially off-putting elements such as small-plate molecular gastronomy or innards.

On the road from Miami back to LA, the film only has time to stop in New Orleans – for coffee and beignets at Café Du Monde, naturally – and in Austin, where Franklin BBQ co-founder Aaron Franklin cameos as himself (for American barbecue devotees, this is a huge deal). The film commendably emphasises the long hours required to make it as a chef, whether roving or bricks-and-mortar, and nails the small details such as being hassled by police about permit rights over where a truck can be parked. **S**



Slice and dice: Emjay Anthony, Jon Favreau

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jon Favreau

Segei Bepalov

Written by

Jon Favreau

Director of

Photography

Kramer Morgenthau

Film Editor

Robert Leighton

Production Designer

Denise Pizzini

Production

Sound Mixer

Ronald Judkins

Costume Designer

Laura Jean Shannon

©Sous Chef LLC

Production

Companies

Open Road Films

and Aldamisa

Entertainment

present in association

with Kilburn Media

and Fetisov Teterin

Films a Fairview

Entertainment

production

In association with

Prescience and

Altus Media

Executive Producers

Karen Gilchrist

Molly Allen

Mark C. Manuel

Ted O'Neal

Gleb Fetisov

Oleg Teterin

Marina Bepalov

James D. Brubaker

Jere Hausfater

Philip Elway

Tim Smith

Paul Brett

Anne Sheehan

Jerry Fruchtman

Peter Fruchtman

Craig Chapman

Boris Teterov

Scott Steindorff

Dylan Russell

Jason Rose

CAST

Jon Favreau

Carl Casper

Sofia Vergara

Inez

John Leguizamo

Martin

Scarlett Johansson

Molly

Dustin Hoffman

Riva

Oliver Platt

Ramsey Michel

Bobby Cannavale

Tony

Amy Sedaris

Jen

Emjay Anthony

Percy Casper

Robert Downey Jr

Marvin

[uncredited]

Aaron Franklin

himself

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

physically disabled women, others psychotic.

Although such 'casting' raises the issue of whether it is ethical to film the mentally ill for purposes unconnected with their welfare, Dumont's approach is more compassionate than exploitative. It also draws attention to the heartlessness of status-minded families who regard afflicted relatives as stains to be concealed. The glimmers of empathy between Camille and the childlike Mademoiselle Lucas (Alexandra Lucas), in particular, emphasise the callousness and self-absorption of Camille's religiose brother Paul and, by extension, the entire bourgeois Claudel clan, who had been scandalised by the sculptor's bohemianism and destructive extramarital affair with Auguste Rodin.

Although Camille spurns Mademoiselle Lucas on one occasion, at other times she carefully guides her along the asylum's stone arcades, and thanks her for bringing her a message. In the film's most tender moment, Mademoiselle Lucas, sitting behind Camille in an auditorium where patients are stumblingly rehearsing *Don Juan*, reaches out to her, as if she has gleaned that the play concerns love (it also triggers Camille's memories of serial womaniser Rodin, and a sobbing fit). Yet when Camille runs to hug Paul on his arrival – her hair decorated with wild flowers for the occasion – the sanctimonious man of God reacts with stiffness bordering on revulsion. His judgement of her – "God allows for experience, Camille. He allows for us to fall into sin to confirm the secrets of his wisdom," adapted from Job 11:6 – ignores her humanity.

Another of his epigrams – "Everything is a parable" – is closer to the mark. Camille works on an ink sketch of a tree and starts to mould a small figure in one hand. She quickly gives up on both, sensing that they are futile endeavours. Intensely conveyed by Binoche, the wretchedness engendered by Camille's withdrawal from art – her ultimate sacrifice – approximates the transfigurative torment evinced by Falconetti in Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), though in Camille's case it precedes not death but a serene acceptance of her fate. Conversely, Paul's use of religion to boost his ego suggests that his mystical rhetoric is hollow. In keeping with Dumont's atheism, the film can be read as a parable of holy martyrdom in which the true faith is art.

It is also a feminist discourse, Camille being the victim of the censorious patriarchy embodied by Paul, who represents both the Church and (as a career diplomat) the state. More culpable for her psychological distress is Rodin – the invisible elephant in the room – whose refusal to leave his long-time partner Rose Beuret for his "ferocious" mistress caused her breakdown. He had clearly displaced her late supportive father in her unresolved Electra complex, but the Camille in Dumont's film has conveniently sublimated his sexual role. Instead, she sees him as a "diabolical mind", whose imperative was to steal her studio and ideas because "he was afraid I'd become greater than him in his lifetime". If Dumont errs in having her protest, anachronistically, about "female exploitation", making her insecurity as a virtuosic sculptor the fount of her anguish aligns with the director's insistence on art as the source of spirituality. **S**

Los Angeles, the present. Chef Carl Casper made his name in Miami ten years ago but now turns out unadventurous food in a neighbourhood restaurant. He quits his job after a scathing review from critic Ramsey Michel. He returns to Miami

and, with the help of his ex-wife Inez's wealthy ex-husband Marvin, acquires a food truck. Driving it back to LA, Carl grows closer with his son Percy. In LA, the truck is a hit. Impressed, Michel becomes Casper's partner in a new restaurant.

Chinese Puzzle

France/Belgium 2013
Director: Cédric Klapisch
Certificate 15 117m 15s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Walk through the retail precincts of Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn today and you'll realise that much of the city of New York now exists principally as an outdoor mall dealing in artisanal goods that cater to the tastes of the moneyed classes of Europe. Given that this is the inscribed audience of Cédric Klapisch's *Chinese Puzzle*, a romantic comedy about Parisians in New York, credit is due to the writer-director for making a slight effort to ground his film's action in a real city of Fung Wah buses and astronomical rents.

Klapisch is after NYC as an ideal and a concept as much as an actual place, and to charges of touristic ogling it should be noted that much the same could have been said of his approach in *Paris* (2008). With *Chinese Puzzle*, he continues a series that began with 2002's *LAuberge espagnole* and 2005's *Russian Dolls* and presumably concludes here, happily ever after, in the New World. *Chinese Puzzle* reunites the principals from those previous films – Romain Duris (Xavier), Audrey Tautou (Martine), Kelly Reilly (Wendy) and Cécile de France (Isabelle), whom we have seen age over a dozen years and who are now pushing 40, having fallen in and out of love from film to film.

Bringing his cast into Woody Allen's back yard, Klapisch adapts a few of that director's jokes in the process: the fish-out-of-water Hasidic costume sight gag of *Annie Hall* is repurposed, so that Xavier, when meeting his ex-partner Wendy's new American boyfriend, pictures himself in the costume of a 15th-century Frenchman. Instead of a Marshall McLuhan cameo, we have walk-ons by Schopenhauer and Hegel – or at least an actor playing them. There's even a reprise of the sham-relationship photo-taking scenes from Peter Weir's *Green Card* (1990).

Schopenhauer and Hegel show up only to distil the genius of German philosophy into bite-sized, Chicken Soup for the Soul-style wisdom. *Chinese Puzzle* is consistently content to scratch the surface rather than explore the depths, and for this reason Klapisch's 'Spanish Apartment Trilogy' will never have the cachet of Richard



New York forays: Audrey Tautou, Romain Duris

Linklater's *Before...* movies – nor does it betray any such high-minded intentions. At one point, with Isabelle nearly caught in flagrante by her girlfriend, the movie even takes to using boudoir-farce manoeuvres that are older than Versailles. Sometimes the tried-and-true material sticks around for a reason – I laughed, dear reader.

The best argument I've heard for Klapisch's cliché-ridden work in the romcom line is that he, and the characters he writes, use cliché teasingly and knowingly, and that the films take into account the role cliché plays in our daily lives. Even given this, *Chinese Puzzle* is perilously slight stuff to sustain a nearly two-hour running time, and many of its emotional effects – particularly with regard to the renewed affair between Xavier and Martine – take the viewer's investment in these characters rather too much for granted. The movie is more uncertain when dealing with parent-child bonds, ostensibly the very thing that puts the plot in motion. Lip service to the sanctity of parenthood aside, it is obvious that Klapisch prefers to watch grown-ups at play. 🍷

Common People

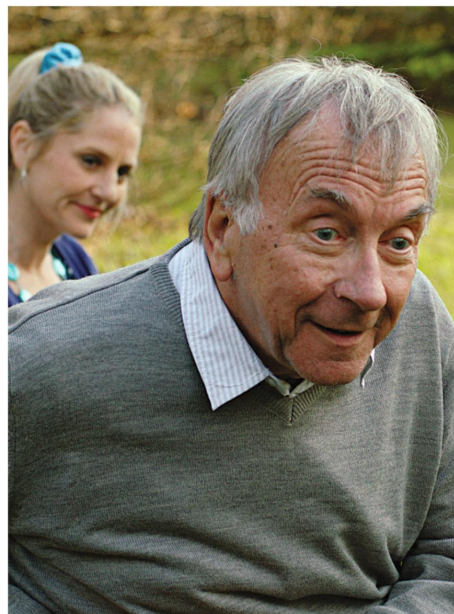
United Kingdom 2012
Directors: Stewart Alexander, Kerry Skinner
Certificate 12A 89m 19s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The 'common people' here are not the ones of the Pulp song of the same name. People who, in Jarvis Cocker's words, "dance and drink and screw, because there's nothing else to do" would likely meet with this film's polite disapproval, conspicuously invested as it is in community, niceness and the rehabilitation of the ill-behaved. Its interwoven stories all take place on London's Tooting Common: a daytime drinker is redeemed simply by deciding not to drink; a thuggish dog-walker taken to task for allowing his animal to foul the grass cravenly apologises; a teenage boy inclined to abuse of the homeless is passed back by the police to his mother, who deals him some sound slaps around the head. And the homeless victim – in case we're in any doubt as to his right not to be beaten up – turns out to be a war hero...

With its patchwork of relatable modern niggles and crises and an agenda at once feelgood and finger-waggingly moral, this low-budget British comedy combines elements of a Richard Curtis romcom, a showy department-store ad and a party political broadcast. (It already has an endorsement from the Conservative mayor of London, Boris Johnson.) The film doesn't always permit its humble seekers after justice to get what they so clearly deserve. The widowed father who gives his bank's call centre an impassioned rant about bail-outs and bonuses meets with a nicely anti-climactic "Would you like to speak to a supervisor?" An old couple's fantasy of riding their mobility scooters off Beachy Head "like Thelma and Louise" is undercut by sad reality when the man is later seen alone, his wife presumably having met a less flamboyant end.

For the most part, however, targets are easy and ambiguities comfortingly absent: socially undesirable or disruptive individuals are just good people waiting to be recognised; a happy melting pot of different races is "what makes London great"; pre-term babies pop out cleanly while onlooking boy scouts chant "Push, push, push!" War, meanwhile, is a vague and distant matter in political terms, but the fighting of



Kerry Skinner, Sam Kelly

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bruno Levy
Screenplay
Cédric Klapisch
Director of Photography
Natasha Braier
Editor
Anne-Sophie Bion
Art Director
Roshelle Berliner
Music
Loïc Dury
Christophe
'Disco' Minck
Sound Recordist
Cyril Moisson
Costumes
Anne Schotte

©Ce Qui Me Meut,
StudioCanal, France
2 Cinéma, Panache
Productions, CIE
Cinématographique,
RTBF (Télévision
Belge)
Production Companies

Ce Qui Me Meut and
StudioCanal presents
In co-production
with Ce Qui Me
Meut, StudioCanal,
France 2 Cinéma
Co-producers:
Panache
Productions, CIE
Cinématographique,
RTBF (Télévision
Belge), Belgacom
Associate producer:
CN2 Productions
With the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+,
France Télévisions,
France 4
In association with
Banque Postale
Image 6, Cinéma 7
Executive Producer
Raphael Benoliel

CAST

Romain Duris
Xavier
Audrey Tautou

Martine
Cécile de France
Isabelle
Kelly Reilly
Wendy
Sandrine Holt
Ju
Margaux Mansart
Mia
Pablo Mugnier-Jacob
Tom
Flore Bonaventura
Isabelle de Groote
Benoît Jacquot
Xavier's father

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[L.R.S.]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title
Casse-tête chinois

Paris and New York, present day. From a rooftop in Chinatown, novelist Xavier tells his editor back in Paris about recent events in his life.

When Wendy, his girlfriend of ten years, dumps him and moves to New York, he moves there too to be near their two children. Their breakup was precipitated by Xavier helping his lesbian friend Isabelle to become pregnant; in turn she and her girlfriend Ju, who are now living in Brooklyn, help him to find an apartment. While working on his third novel, Xavier takes a job as a bike messenger to pay for the lawyer's fees that he has incurred in his squabbles with Wendy. When Martine, an ex-lover, comes to New York on business, she and Xavier reignite their affair. To obtain American citizenship, however, Xavier must fabricate a relationship with a Chinese-American girl, a relation of a cab driver whose life he helped to save. Xavier tries to fool the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents who are investigating his case. He also has to cover up Isabelle's affair with her babysitter. Martine returns to New York with her two children, and again resumes her affair with Xavier. He is reluctant to get involved but as Martine is preparing to leave New York, he runs after her and urges her to stay.

Cycling with Molière

France 2012

Director: Philippe Le Guay

it confers automatic maudlin dignity. Having gently mocked pregnant barmaid Jenny for patriotically agreeing to a one-night stand with a man she believed was deploying to Afghanistan the next day, the film gamely essays pretty much the same seduction tactic on its own audience, demanding a rush of guilty respect for the tramp who turns out to be a decorated veteran.

That a young woman would need to be conned into offering up her virtue, and that her naivety in so doing should be expected to raise a snigger, is characteristic of a film that is steadfastly old-fashioned in spite of its camera phones and bad bankers. Jenny even refers to her fly-by-night partner – an American – as a “Yank” and a “GI”. And her problematic single-motherhood arrives with its own potential solution in the form of the scoutmaster, smirkingly named Mr Wright, who steps in to deliver her child and with whom she improbably commences flirting during the abrupt and bloodless parturition. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Stewart Alexander Kerry Skinner	Production Company Common People Productions Ltd presents	Alec Utgoff Veiko
Producer Darin McLeod	Executive Producers Dom Moorhouse David J. Beringer	Sidney Cole Buster
Written by Stewart Alexander		Michael Ballard homeless
Director of Photography Andrew Johnson		Melody Weston Shaw Veronica Baxter
Editor Oliver Parker	CAST	Stewart Alexander Harry
Production Designer Martin Christopher	Sam Kelly Derrick	Tom Gilling Phil
Composer Tom Hodge	Diana Payan Pam	Kerry Skinner Jenny
Sound Recordist Merlin Bonning	Iarla McGowan Ian Baxter	In Colour [1.85:1]
Costume Designer Bonnie Radcliffe	Joshua Herdman Simon	Distributor Common People Productions Ltd
©Common People Productions Ltd	Jeff Mash Mr Wright	
	Eleanor Fanyinka Alesha	

Tooting Common, south London, the present. Over the course of a few days, widowed father Ian and his daughter Veronica look for missing bird Princess Parrot; Ian talks to his bank on the phone about his debts. A homeless man sits alone on a bench. Scout leader Guy tries to interest his charges in ornithology. Cyclist Harry meets friends, including Alesha, for daytime drinking and conversation. Elderly couple Pam and Derrick eat sandwiches and playfully discuss a suicide pact. Heavily pregnant Jenny sits next to the homeless man and tells him about her brief encounter with her baby's father. Veronica falls in dog excrement, which infects her eye. Jenny goes into labour while talking to the scouts; Guy delivers her baby. The homeless man is baited by youths, who film the assault on their camera phones; he takes one of the phones. Ian confronts the dog owner responsible for the mess, who apologises. Police come to reclaim the youth's phone from the homeless man and see the incriminating footage. The policewoman notices the homeless man's military credentials. Harry, drunk, confesses his love to Alesha; she advises him to tell her when he's sober. Harry falls asleep on the bench and on awaking hears Princess Parrot repeating Alesha's request. He returns later and proposes to her on one knee; she accepts. Derrick, alone since Pam's death, meets Jenny and her baby, named Scout. While they are talking, Princess Parrot joins them; Veronica spots her, and a troupe of the common's regular visitors take her to safety.

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Cycling with Molière brings a great stage classic – Molière's *Le Misanthrope* – to the present day through the relationship between two actors. To say that it is about performance would be an understatement: acting is its ostensible subject and its raison d'être in more ways than one, since the project originated in a suggestion by lead actor Fabrice Luchini (a fan of the play and co-scriptwriter of the film) to the director Philippe Le Guay; the two had already collaborated on the successful 2010 comedy *The Women on the 6th Floor*.

Under the cover of looking for a house, Gauthier Valence (Lambert Wilson) tries to convince grouchy former stage star Serge Tanneur (Luchini) to come out of self-imposed retirement to act in his new stage production of Molière's play. During a week spent in Serge's hideout on the Ile de Ré, off the Atlantic coast, the two friends rehearse, eat, laugh, cycle, quarrel and predictably fall out.

In classic film-about-the-theatre fashion, *Cycling with Molière* delights in blurring the boundaries between the text and the 'real life' of the characters. Molière's play, first performed in 1666, is a satire on the hypocrisies of courtly society, seen from the perspective of its central character Alceste, the 'misanthrope' of the title. Alceste refuses to play by the rules of polite society, insisting on honesty at all costs, and as a result is ostracised.

Initially, it is clear that Serge is indeed a misanthropist, an embittered recluse who abandoned theatre and film following what he perceived as a betrayal. Meanwhile Gauthier, suave and successful, echoes Philinte, Alceste's friend in the play. However, Gauthier wants the role of Alceste for himself, while casting Serge as Philinte. To entice Serge he suggests that

they alternate the two roles, and so they begin to mirror each other in a tense power play, at times subtly and at other times less so (at different stages both get soaked as they tumble off their bicycles into the water). While Gauthier's narcissistic superficiality is mocked by the film and by Serge, the latter is not above cheating and compromise – and his snobbery towards the television soap opera Gauthier stars in is prompted in part by jealousy of his friend's fame and wealth.

Like the original play, *Cycling with Molière* is a wry observation of society's foibles. Brought to the present day, the microcosm of Louis XIV's court becomes the media world – theatre and television, and indirectly the cinema. More concretely the film homes in on the fashionable world of the Ile de Ré, where Parisian media folk have all but evicted the original population of fishermen and farmers. In the end, Serge's much vaunted contempt for wealth and fashion, expressed through the clutter and lack of comfort of his house, is only a variation on the phenomenon, and he is not that different from his fellow actors who have colonised and done up the island's pretty cottages.

There are quibbles with this film. The last third drags a little and some comic touches are clunky, while the women's roles are reductive in their sexual focus – dark-haired Francesca, the melodramatic Italian beauty; blonde Zoé (Laurie Bordesoules), the young porn actress. Nevertheless, these aspects do not spoil the complex representation of performance that sustains the film, nor the performances themselves, and the juxtaposition of Molière's sublime language with contemporary French is a delight. *Cycling with Molière* gives us both a French-language fest and acting fireworks. **S**



Fabrice Luchini

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Anne-Dominique Toussaint	Production Designer Françoise Dupertuis	France 2 Cinema	with the support of Département de la Charente-Maritime and the Région Poitou-Charentes in partnership with the CNC	Camille Japy Christine Annie Mercier Tamara	In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles
Screenplay/ Adaptation/ Dialogue Philippe Le Guay	Music Jorge Arriagada	Production Companies Anne-Dominique Toussaint presents a co-production of Les Films des Tournelles, Pathé, Appaloosa Développement, France 2 Cinéma in association with Soficinéma 8 and Soficinéma 9		Ged Marlon Christophe Meynard	Distributor Curzon Film World
Based on an original idea by Fabrice Luchini, Philippe Le Guay	Sound Laurent Poirier	Costume Designer Elisabeth Tavernier		Stéphan Wojtowicz taxi driver	French theatrical title <i>Alceste à bicyclette</i>
Director of Photography Jean-Claude Larrieu	Editor Monica Coleman	©Les Films Des Tournelles, Pathé Production, Appaloosa Développement,	CAST	Christine Murillo Madame François	
			Fabrice Luchini Serge Tanneur	Josiane Stoleru Raphaëlle La Puisaye	
			Lambert Wilson Gauthier Valence	Laurie Bordesoules Zoé	
			Maya Sansa Francesca	Dolby Digital	

The Ile de Ré, western France, the present. Pretending to be house-hunting, TV and stage star Gauthier Valence visits the island in the hope of persuading his friend Serge Tanneur to act in his forthcoming production of Molière's 'Le Misanthrope'. Serge, who retired from the stage three years earlier, has become embittered and cynical about humanity, like Alceste, the hero of the play. He initially declines the offer but then agrees to rehearse with Gauthier for a week. Gauthier suggests that they alternate playing the lead role of Alceste and that of his friend Philinte, a less important

character, and Serge agrees. During the week the two rehearse, eat and cycle together, and also quarrel. As Serge endlessly delays his decision, Gauthier's patience wears thin; tensions between the two are heightened as they compete for the affections of Francesca, a beautiful Italian neighbour. Serge falls for Francesca but she sleeps with Gauthier. Serge takes his revenge by insisting on playing Alceste. Gauthier refuses.

We see Gauthier on stage, playing Alceste and stumbling over a line. The last shot is of Serge alone on the beach.

Devil's Knot

USA 2013
Director: Atom Egoyan
Certificate 15 113m 55s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The shameful facts of the West Memphis Three saga are widely known, primarily thanks to Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's *Paradise Lost* trilogy, which raised public awareness of Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley Jr, Arkansas teenagers convicted in 1994 of the murder of three young boys. Those documentaries made clear that local distrust of, and distaste for, unwholesome black-clad outsiders was more responsible for the convictions than sketchy circumstantial evidence or later-recanted testimony.

There's a smattering of period paranoia – about ritual child sacrifice, the corrosive effects of metal music – in Atom Egoyan's dramatised version of these events, but the film isn't interested in big-picture cultural analysis. Granted the benefit of hindsight, it squanders the opportunity to consider how regional branches of the judicial and law-enforcement system came to the conclusion that their business included combating Satan's influence over wayward youth.

The script includes exposition-crammed dialogue ineloquently summarising holes in the prosecution's case. Investigator Ron Lax (Colin Firth) is pained and decent, sharing the stage with victim's mother Reese Witherspoon in full Oscar mode (in the pejorative sense), gifted with the chance for great racking shrieks of grief and emotional parental yelling. It has generally been accepted that the once widely revered Egoyan became an (at best) bantamweight sometime in the past decade; this ploddingly mournful effort does little to counteract that impression. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Elizabeth Fowler
Richard Saperstein
Clark Peterson
Christopher Woodrow
Paul Harris
Boardman
Screenplay
Paul Harris
Boardman
Scott Derrickson
Based on the book
Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three
by Mara Leveritt
Director of Photography
Paul Sarossy
Edited by
Susan Shipton
Production Designer
Phillip Barker
Music
Mychael Danna
Sound Design
Steven Munro
Costume Designer
Kari Perkins

The Weinstein Company and Worldwide Entertainment present a film by Atom Egoyan
With the participation of the Province of Ontario Production Services Tax Credit and the Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Molly Connors
Maria Cestone
Sarah Johnson
Redlich
Hoyt David Morgan
Jason Baldwin
Jessie Misskelley Jr
Mara Leveritt
Holly Ballard
Scott Derrickson
David Alper
Jacob Pechenik
Michael Flynn

CAST

Colin Firth
Ron Lax
Reese Witherspoon

Pam Hobbs
Dane DeHaan
Chris Morgan
Mireille Enos
Vicki Hutcheson
Bruce Greenwood
Judge Burnett
Elias Koteas
Jerry Driver
Stephen Moyer
John Foglerman
Alessandro Nivola
Terry Hobbs
Amy Ryan
Margaret Lax
Robert Baker
Detective Bryn Ridge
Kevin Durand
John Mark Byers
Michael Gladis
Dan Stidham
James Hamrick
Damien Echols
Kris Higgins
Jessie Misskelley Jr
Seth Meriwether
Jason Baldwin
Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

May 1993, West Memphis, Arkansas. Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley Jr are arrested for the murder of three young boys. Despite investigator Ron Lax's efforts, all three are convicted in a religiously charged trial. An epilogue summarises post-1994 developments, including the defendants' 2011 release from prison.

The Fault in Our Stars

USA/Canada/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Josh Boone
Certificate 12A 121m 0s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Josh Boone's weepie *The Fault in Our Stars* – an adaptation of John Green's popular 2012 'young adult' novel – follows the likes of Jonathan Levine's *50/50* (2011) as a brave attempt to sculpt sharp-edged entertainment from tricky subject matter: young people suffering from cancer.

Our heroine is Hazel (Shailene Woodley), a cynical, likeable and highly literate 17-year-old who seems remarkably sanguine about her condition and is apparently more concerned about her parents' wellbeing than her own ("The only thing worse than biting it from cancer is having a kid bite it from cancer," she says.) At the behest of her mother (a radiant Laura Dern), Hazel attends a support group at the local church, where she strikes up an immediate rapport with amputee Augustus Waters (Ansel Elgort), a fellow wiseass whose cancer appears to be in remission.

The film is at its best in its observational early stages, which successfully establish Hazel and Augustus as anything but meek hostages to events beyond their control. The two actors share convincing chemistry, and Hazel's amusingly dry first-person narration is stuffed with meta sass, taking aim at teen-movie clichés and assuring us that we're going to get the real deal. ("This is the truth. Sorry.")

Alas, the idea that *The Fault in Our Stars* is going to do anything radical is steadily dismantled by the approach of the filmmakers, who lean heavily on the conventional narrative beats and sleek, shiny visual style associated with Nicholas Sparks adaptations (*Safe Haven*, *The Lucky One*). A twinkly acoustic score by the indie folk band Bright Eyes is simultaneously bland and overbearing. Even Willem Dafoe, who puts in a creepy, malevolent shift as a boozy author, is unable to rattle significantly the film's cage of composure.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Wyck Godfrey
Marty Bowen
Screenplay
Scott Neustadter
Michael H. Weber
Based upon the book by John Green
Director of Photography
Ben Richardson
Film Editor
Robb Sullivan
Production Designer
Molly Hughes
Music
Mike Mogis
Nathaniel Walcott
Production Sound Mixer
Jim Ensmüller
Costume Designer
Mary Claire Hannan

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Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)
Production Companies
Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Temple Hill production
Made in association with TSG Entertainment and Dayday Films
Produced in association with Ingenious Media
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program
Executive Producers
Michele Imperato
Stabile
Isaac Klausner

CAST

Shailene Woodley
Hazel Grace

Lancaster
Ansel Elgort
Augustus Waters, 'Gus'
Laura Dern
Frannie Lancaster
Sam Trammell
Michael
Nat Wolff
Isaac
Willem Dafoe
Peter Van Houten
Mike Birbiglia
Patrick
Lotte Verbeek
Lidewij Vliegthart

Dolby Digital/Datasat/SDDS In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)



Living with it: Ansel Elgort, Shailene Woodley

The Fault in Our Stars also possesses an off-puttingly manipulative streak. Hazel is consciously set up as the likeliest character to be struck down, only for a narrative bait-and-switch to place Augustus in the frame. The aim may have been to illustrate the unpredictability of this horrible disease but in Boone's hands it smacks of velvet-gloved mendacity. Even more tasteless is a badly misjudged scene in which Hazel and Augustus visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam: Hazel's laboured efforts to climb the stairs, while no doubt a big deal for her personally, are explicitly – and unwisely – compared with Frank's travails.

While *The Fault in Our Stars* suffers from its overly slick approach and penchant for unnecessary emotional contrivance, it's never less than watchable, and should be commended for going to places less courageous films wouldn't dare. Moreover, it features in Woodley a genuine star in the making. Her tough, layered performance is easily the best thing here. **S**

Indianapolis, present day. Sixteen-year-old Hazel has cancer. While reluctantly attending a support group at church, she meets 17-year-old Augustus, who had osteosarcoma but is now cancer-free after having had his leg amputated. They agree to read each other's favourite novels. Hazel recommends 'An Imperial Affliction', about a young girl with cancer, written by a mysterious author named Peter Van Houten. Augustus and Hazel make email contact with Van Houten. Hazel wants to know more about the book's ambiguous ending, and Van Houten invites her to visit if she is ever in Amsterdam. Augustus uses his 'wish' from a charitable foundation to arrange a trip to Amsterdam. Hazel falls seriously ill but recovers in time to go on the trip, despite the doctors' warnings. While in Amsterdam, Hazel and Augustus meet Van Houten, but he's a drunk who appals them with his obstreperous behaviour. Van Houten's embarrassed assistant Lidewij takes the pair on a tour of the city. When Hazel and Augustus return to their hotel, they consummate their relationship.

Back in Indianapolis, Augustus reveals that his cancer returned aggressively shortly before the Amsterdam trip. In his final days, he arranges a pre-funeral for himself, at which his friend Isaac and Hazel give eulogies. Augustus dies. At the funeral, Van Houten appears and gives Hazel a letter, which she doesn't read. Van Houten reveals that he lost a daughter to cancer. Hazel tells him to leave her alone. Isaac informs Hazel that the letter was from Augustus, who had requested Van Houten's help in writing a eulogy for Hazel.

Godzilla

USA/Japan 2014
Director: Gareth Edwards
Certificate 12A 122m 56s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The first attempt to retool Toho Studios' Japanese monster franchise for international consumption came when new footage (featuring Raymond Burr as a reporter) was spliced into the dubbed re-edit of Honda Ishiro's *Gojira* (1954), released as *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956). The Japanese series evolved, and the rampaging radioactive dinosaur reformed as a child-friendly protector of the planet – with occasional backsliding into his former city-smashing ways. Meanwhile, there was a long period when Toho and various American partners tried to develop a non-Japanese Godzilla franchise – a process that yielded Roland Emmerich's *Godzilla* (1998). In Hollywood terms, Emmerich's film – a decent enough unofficial remake of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), the film Toho imitated in the first place, but with an off-model enlarged iguana that simply didn't look like Godzilla – seemed the end of the story. However, Toho rapidly rebooted with *Gojira ni-sen mireniamu* (*Godzilla 2000*), and showed what it thought about the Americanised creature by having it squashed by the real Godzilla in *Gojira: Fainaru uozu* (*Godzilla, Final Wars*).

A generation on, Gareth Edwards's *Godzilla* learns from the negative example of Emmerich's film. Though realised via CGI rather than by having a sumo wrestler in a rubber suit stomp on a miniature city, the monster here conforms to the classic Godzilla design (tweaked many times over the years). Lumbering rather than lizard-quick, this Godzilla is a literal tower of strength, unloosing its radioactive breath against newly made 'MUTOs' (Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organisms) in an impressive display of force. In a canny rewrite of the history of the series, this Godzilla has been at large since the early 1950s – the US Pacific bomb tests of the period were actually attempts to kill the thing. Ken Watanabe's Dr Serizawa, a character named after the self-sacrificing scientist who destroyed Gojira in Honda's film, speaks up for the "apex predator" as a "balancing force" that manifests whenever other *kaiju* threaten the world.

Godzilla began fighting other monsters in his second film appearance, *Gojira no gyakushu* (*Gigantis the Fire Monster*, 1955) and transformed into a heroic defender of the Earth against alien invaders with *San daikaiju: Chikyu saidai no kessen* (*Ghidorah the Three-Headed Monster*, 1964). However, the inspiration for this iteration of Godzilla seems to be the 1990s revival of Gamera, a rival *kaiju*, in a series beginning with Kaneko Shusuke's *Gamera daikaiju kuchu kessen* (*Gamera, Guardian of the Universe*, 1995), in which the giant turtle is exactly the kind of natural balance on other monsters that Max Borenstein's script makes Godzilla here. Kaneko's film was influential enough – redeeming a franchise that Godzilla's fans tended to look down on – for Toho to recruit him to contribute to its 'millennial' series with *Gojira, Mosura, Kingu Godora: Daikaiju sokogeki* (*Godzilla, Mothra and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack*, 2001). The design of the MUTOs is even in line with the blade-headed, fantastical creatures Gamera tends to fight – though the plot motor of them trampling over human civilisation in order to mate also evokes Edwards's debut feature, the far less expensive *Monsters* (2010).



A night on the reptiles: *Godzilla*

It is beside the point to complain that the human element in a Godzilla movie is weak; merely not being as irritating as the human cast led by Matthew Broderick in 1998 scrapes a passing grade. This hauls in the frankly overqualified likes of Bryan Cranston, Sally Hawkins, Juliette Binoche and David Strathairn to do little more than Raymond Burr did – look awed and earnest while reporting on the damage. Once the subplot about Cranston's grieving conspiracy theorist is concluded by his character's death, the film relies on an utterly token familial bond between the sensitive-yet-macho bomb expert Ford Brody (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and his wife Elle (Elizabeth Olsen) and son. However, rescuing any surrogate imperilled child – a Japanese kid separated from his parents on a Hawaiian monorail, for example – will do at a pinch to underline Ford's heroism. There's an odd discrepancy between his dedication to his military duties and his wife's willingness to

walk off her job (she's an ER nurse) because a family hug is more important than ministering to the many casualties of the monster crisis.

Edwards takes care to include people in the frame, often for size reference, and stages excellent moments of awe-inspiring peril in which tiny figures are dwarfed by monsters and general devastation – a monster attack on a rickety bridge transporting a nuclear weapon by train, a Ligeti-scored high-altitude parachute jump into a smoke-shrouded city, the tsunami that signals Godzilla's first approach to land. What's lacking is any connection between Ford and Godzilla (though Ford's childhood bedroom has a giant monster poster and he has named one of his pets 'Mothra') beyond the fact that they're both heroes in this film. Still, no one is really begging for an ongoing 'Ford Brody' franchise; the job this does successfully is bringing back the One True Godzilla and positioning him again as 'King of the Monsters'. 🐉

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Thomas Tull
Jon Jashni
Mary Parent
Brian Rogers
Screenplay
Max Borenstein
Story
David Callaham
Based on the character Godzilla owned and created by Toho Co., Ltd.
Director of Photography
Seamus McGarvey
Film Editor
Bob Ducsay

Production Designer
Owen Paterson
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Sound Design
Erik Aadahl
Ethan Van Der Ryn
Costumes
Designed by Sharen Davis
Visual Effects
MPC
Double Negative
Pixel Pirates
Scanline VFX
Hammerhead Productions
Pixel Playground

Concept Design
Weta Workshop Ltd
Stunt Co-ordinator
John Stoneham Jr
Jake Mervine

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Legendary Pictures Productions, LLC
and Ratpac-Dune Entertainment LLC
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures
and Legendary Pictures present a
Legendary Pictures

production
A Gareth Edwards film
Produced in association with
Advanced Audiovisual Productions, Inc
With the participation of the Province of British Columbia
Production Services Tax Credit, the Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit
Filmed with the assistance of Hawaii Production Tax Credits

Executive Producers
Patricia Whitcher
Alex Garcia
Banno Yoshimitsu
Okuhira Kenji

CAST
Aaron Taylor-Johnson
Ford Brody
Ken Watanabe
Dr Ishiro Serizawa
Elizabeth Olsen
Elle Brody
Juliette Binoche
Sandra Brody
Sally Hawkins
Vivienne Graham

David Strathairn
Admiral William Stenz
Bryan Cranston
Joe Brody
Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

Japan, 1999. The coastal city of Janjira is devastated by a mystery disaster, causing a meltdown at a nuclear power plant.

The present. Nuclear technician Joe Brody – who lost his wife in the disaster – is obsessed with finding out what happened. He persuades his son Ford, a US navy bomb-disposal expert, to accompany him to the quarantined, abandoned city to retrieve computer data. Joe and Ford are apprehended by Monarch, an international organisation that has monitored giant radioactive monster Gojira/Godzilla since the 1950s.

Joe is killed when the 'MUTO' (Massive Unidentified

Terrestrial Organism) that was responsible for the destruction of Janjira emerges from a cocoon. The creature flies across the Pacific, following the mating call of a female monster that has awakened from dormancy in a US containment facility in Nevada. Ford tries to return home to San Francisco to reunite with his wife and son, but also volunteers to join Monarch and the US armed forces in deploying a nuclear weapon against the MUTOs. Godzilla, which Monarch head Dr Serizawa theorises is a balancing force of nature, reappears and fights the MUTOs in San Francisco. Ford destroys a nest of MUTO eggs while Godzilla defeats the full-grown monsters.

Grace of Monaco

Director: Olivier Dahan
Certificate PG 102m 44s

Reviewed by Sophie Ivan

Olivier's Dahan's biopic has been dismissed by Grace Kelly's family as a fiction, but as its reception at this year's Cannes attests, excessive artistic licence is the least of its problems. Far more scandalous is the almost entire absence of dramatic tension and incident, since the closest thing the film has to a narrative engine is a parochial tax squabble between Prince Rainier and Charles de Gaulle.

The film imagines Kelly's identity crisis – which leaves her torn between Hollywood roles and playing her part as royal consort – at the centre of this storm in a teacup, and like a dogged hack, screenwriter Arash Amel persists in spinning a feature-length melodrama out of a minor tabloid headline. Unsurprisingly, he rapidly finds himself running out of yarn.

Like the rest of the cast, who appear to be channelling 'Allo 'Allo outtakes, a breathless Nicole Kidman has little option but to ham it up, especially in the montage sequence of Kelly being schooled in regal deportment by a Monégasque count (Derek Jacobi). His tactics include the use of flashcards emblazoned with emotions – 'arrogance', 'trust', 'serenity' etc – which Kidman, framed in invasive close-up, is forced to enact, more like a performing monkey than an Oscar-winning actress portraying an Oscar-winning actress. It's hard not to wonder whether Dahan employed a similar approach to his direction. 📡

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Pierre-Ange Le Pogam Uday Chopra Arash Amel Written by Arash Amel Director of Photography Eric Gauthier Editor Oliver Gajan Production Designer Dan Weil Music Christopher YOUNG Sound Laurent Zeilig Jean-Paul Hurier Costume Designer Gigi Lepage	participation of Wallonia and Canal+ and TR1 Executive Producers Claudia Bluemhuber Jeremy Burdek Uta Fredebeil Bill Johnson Nadia Khamlichi Jonathan Reiman Jim Seibel Bastien Sirodot Bruno Wu CAST Nicole Kidman Grace Kelly Tim Roth Prince Rainier III Frank Langella Father Francis Tucker Paz Vega Maria Callas Parker Posey Madge Tivey-Faucon Milo Ventimiglia Rupert Allan Derek Jacobi Count Fernando D'Aillieres Robert Lindsay Aristotle Onassis Geraldine Somerville	Princess Antoinette Nicholas Farrell Jean-Charles Rey André Penvern Charles de Gaulle Roger Ashton Griffiths Alfred Hitchcock Yves Jacques M. Delavanne Oliver Rabourdin Emile Pelletier Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Warner Bros Distributors (UK)
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Monaco, 1962. Six years into her marriage to Prince Rainier of Monaco, Grace Kelly is offered the lead in Alfred Hitchcock's new movie, 'Marnie'. She is torn between her royal duties and her acting career, and her relationship with Rainier becomes increasingly strained as France threatens to annex Monaco. Finally, Kelly decides to reject Hitchcock's offer. The political crisis is resolved when Rainier signs a treaty compelling French citizens in Monaco to pay income tax to France.

The Hooligan Factory

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Nick Nevern
Certificate 15 89m 39s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Writer-director-star Nick Nevern's affectionate, narratively ramshackle parody *The Hooligan Factory* is surely a film few can have been crying out for. After all, the much maligned subgenre that it sends up, the football-hooligan movie, has already all but cannibalised itself. Lexi Alexander's laughable, hobbit-goes-a-ruckin' fiasco *Green Street* (2005) is now a borderline camp classic, while Nick Love's 2009 reboot of Alan Clarke's bracing 1989 TV film *The Firm* (the bover-boy urtext) constituted little more than a sustained act of fetishised, shell-suited grave-robbing.

The Hooligan Factory's gag success rate is more miss than hit, but a handful of amusing moments knowingly skewer the subgenre's overwrought, cod-operatic male bonding. Its best joke is a running riff on *I.D.* (1995) concerning the continued presence of an 'undercover' cop who makes literally no attempt to hide his police work from thugs too dim to notice. Unfortunately, the satire doesn't extend to challenging the often hostile marginalisation of women in the films it lampoons. On the contrary, *The Hooligan Factory's* worst moments involve the cruel victimisation of female characters in grimly misjudged attempts to garner laughs. 📡

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jason Maza Will Clarke Andy Mayson Written by Michael Lindley Nick Nevern Director of Photography Ali Asad Editor Lewis Albrow Production Designer Paul Burns Music Composer Tom Linden Sound Recordist Mario Mooney Costume Designer Lisa Mitton	Executive Producers Wayne Marc Godfrey Robert Jones Michael Lindley Vinod Kumar Mohindra Sanjay Mohindra Ashwin Bedi Mike Runagall Nick Nevern Michael Lindley Cast Nick Nevern Dexter, 'Dex' Jason Maza Danny Tom Burke Bullet Josef Altin Weasel Ray Fearon Midnight Morgan Watkins Trumpet Lorraine Stanley Sharon Leo Gregory Slasher Craig Fairbrass Mickey	Keith Lee-Castle the Baron In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Altitude Film Distribution
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England, present day. Young wide boy Danny has always dreamed of becoming a hooligan. Dex, leader of a 'firm' named the Hooligan Factory, is released from prison after a long stretch and, following a chance encounter with Danny, takes the young man under his wing. Dex gathers up the disparate members of his firm and vows to take revenge on the Baron, the leader of a rival firm and the man responsible for the death of Dex's young son some years previously. In a series of fights, the Hooligan Factory best various other firms. At a final fight between the Hooligan Factory and the Baron's firm, the Baron shoots Dex dead. Most members of the Hooligan Factory are incarcerated but Danny is released without charge thanks to the kindness of an undercover policeman who has been with the group the whole time.

In Secret

USA 2012
Director: Charlie Stratton
Certificate 15 106m 36s

Reviewed by Carmen Gray

After a career in television, Charlie Stratton turns to feature directing with an American adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*, the 19th-century novel by Emile Zola about an obsessive affair that precipitates murder and its ghouls of conscience. But heavy-handedly reproducing the book's more pulpish, gothic aspects at the expense of character exploration or stylistic risk, his insipidly named *In Secret* lacks a stamp of fresh personality or contemporising flair.

The Victorian period's fascination with morbidity colours the film's world. In an awkward rush of broad-stroke exposition, the child Thérèse, her mother dead, is deposited in the rain at the home of her widowed aunt, Madame Raquin, who enshrines in needlepoint tapestry the household dictum: "Don't make a sound." As Madame Raquin, Jessica Lange is convincingly flinty and emotionally needy by turns, but such blunt literalism is difficult for her and the rest of the cast to ignite. Also oppressing Thérèse is the sickly constitution of Madame Raquin's doted-on son Camille, which leaves her as nursing guardian. Years later, and penniless, Thérèse doesn't protest when her aunt insists she marry Camille. This is an era, it's made clear, when a lack of material means left little agency, and one's fate was vulnerable to the self-interested whims of others.

An abrupt jump takes us to Paris – shot in Budapest as a dingy, stifling lair. Gloom is laid on thick in the haberdashery shop the three inhabit. A bolt of vibrancy strikes through Thérèse's ennui when Laurent, her husband's darkly handsome old acquaintance, starts frequenting their domino evenings. An artist, he regales the other regulars (a gallery of grotesques among which is a police commissioner, prone to muse on monstrous crimes) with talk of having painted corpses at the morgue. Oscar Isaac plays Laurent like a Byronic scoundrel, all smirks and smoulder, reeking of a base sensuality that Thérèse has been starved of by clammy, wheezing Camille (Tom Felton).

Zola defended his novel as a naturalistic study of human temperaments, though his schematic characterisation and bare prose only become flatter under Stratton. At least Isaac has more to work with here than he did as ludicrous erotic fantasy Evgeni in Madonna's *W.E.* (2011), and he has rakish magnetism down pat. Elizabeth Olsen seems less sure of what to bring to thinly sketched Thérèse. She's all gasps and barely concealed, fixated looks that don't get beyond shorthand eroticism. Stratton at first seems keen to play up her desire as liberating sexual awakening, but as the lovers throw themselves into their trysts, hardly caring if they are discovered, it's more light situational farce (he hides up her skirts) than anything transgressive.

Although *Thérèse Raquin* shocked in its day, its brand of hysteria and comeuppance via guilty conscience has little to hook modern audiences, who have moved on to more graphic assaults on moral strictures – such as last year's steamy titillation *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. Visual motifs of entrapment and animal symbolism signposting the torments of humanity's bestial urges abound (a caged bear that has mauled itself conveniently pops into view during a



Wards and scandals: Elizabeth Olsen, Oscar Isaac

walk, for instance). The river's cold dampness seeps through foreboding dreams with blatant foreshadowing – which is faithful to the novel but no more graceful for it. After the decisive boating trip, the film only descends further into gothic melodrama. Laurent's blue-grey portrait of Camille, in which he looks already drowned, hangs over them – subtlety's final sodden grave. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

William Horberg
Pete Shilaimon
Mickey Liddell

Screenplay

Charlie Stratton
Based on the stage play [*Thérèse Raquin*] by Neal Bell
Based on the novel by Émile Zola

Director of Photography

Florian Hoffmeister

Film Editors

Paul Tothill
Celia Haining

Production Designer

Uli Hanisch

Music

Gabriel Yared

Sound Mixer

Mac Ruth

Costume Designer

Pierre-Yves Gayraud

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Production Companies

LD Entertainment
presents a Liddell Entertainment
and a Wonderful Films production
A Charlie Stratton film
Executive Producers
Richard Sharkey
Jennifer Monroe
Charlie Stratton

CAST

Elizabeth Olsen
Thérèse Raquin
Oscar Isaac
Laurent LeClaire
Tom Felton
Camille Raquin
Jessica Lange
Madame Raquin
Shirley Henderson
Suzanne
Matt Lucas
Olivier

Mackenzie Crook

Grivet
John Kavanagh
Inspector Michaud
Lily Lought
young Thérèse
Matt Devere
Thérèse's father
Dimitrije Bogdanov
young Camille

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
Prints by DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

France, the 1860s. After her mother's death, Thérèse is taken to live with her aunt, Madame Raquin, and cousin Camille. Growing up, she nurses sickly Camille. Thérèse consents to marry Camille – Madame Raquin hopes that their union will secure her own future – and the family move to Paris, where Camille becomes a clerk and the women run a haberdasher's shop. Camille's old friend Laurent begins calling. He and Thérèse embark on a passionate affair. When Camille announces that the family is to move back to the country, the lovers, desperate to stay together, consider murdering him. During a boating trip, Laurent throws Camille overboard and he drowns. Though Thérèse and Laurent are not suspected, their guilty consciences torment them. Beset by grief, Madame Raquin has a stroke, which leaves her wheelchair-bound and unable to speak. On the suggestion of family friends, Thérèse and Laurent marry, but their relationship descends into mutual animosity. Madame Raquin overhears them fighting about their crime. Unable to tell anyone, she suffers in silence, finally looking on with satisfaction as they commit suicide by drinking poison.

Leave to Remain

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Bruce Goodison
Certificate 15 89m 4s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Leave to Remain opens in the sort of well-appointed debating hall one might associate with the Oxford Union or the House of Lords. In fluent yet heavily accented English, refugee Omar describes his flight from Afghanistan and his arrival in the UK. It is a tragic tale and one that, as Toby Jones's podgy-faced youth worker explains to the neatly attired audience, the Home Office does not believe. Unless Omar's upcoming appeal is granted, he will be among the 90 per cent of asylum-seekers refused refugee status by the government. So Omar must continue to tell his story, over and over again, until, as he puts it, "all meaning is lost".

Having deftly established this conventional liberal perspective on one of the major humanitarian crises of our age, director Bruce Goodison breaks with it to reveal that story is a palimpsest of lies: Omar (Noof Ousellam) has forged an amalgamation of the tales told to him by the other teen refugees he has met while traversing the British legal and care systems, judiciously editing them to elicit maximum sympathy. It's a risky strategy (especially when dealing with such a political touch-paper as asylum seekers) to cast your tragic hero as a liar but, suggest Goodison and co-writer Charlotte Colbert, reducing individuals to their stories is a meaningless process. The film could be a sequel of sorts to Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (2002), but it might just as well be a rebuttal of its emphasis on the odyssey rather than the outcome.

A docudrama that casts real-life refugees alongside professional actors such as the excellent Ousellam and Jones, the film deals heavily in matters of truth and veracity. As Omar and his fellow refugees pass through various Home Office interviews,



Masieh Zarrien

they are checked and rechecked: fingerprints taken, wisdom teeth examined as proof of age. The officials who carry out these tests are at best brusque, at worst cynical in the extreme. After the 15-year-old Zizidi recounts a brutal beating by her husband and his friends, the female examiner's response is a curt request to "be more precise". This moral and epistemological murk is reflected in the *mise en scène*, which frames the teenage refugees at oblique angles through fences and windows, and renders their interlocutors barely visible. DP Felix Wiedemann's camera makes overzealous use of extreme shallow focus to cast all but the closest of objects and people in a blur, or else hovers near ground level, lending a vertiginous disproportion to the tower blocks surrounding the Home Office in Croydon.

Goodison and Colbert's admirable insistence on their subjects' present rather than their past leaves questions unanswered and lends the narrative a vague, insubstantial quality. *Leave to Remain* lacks both the heft and the wit of, say, Laurent Cantet's *The Class* (2008), which employed similar techniques to engage with disenfranchised youth. Nonetheless Goodison is well served by his cast of non-professional actors, who pepper their semi-improvised dialogue with Jafaican teen-speak, talking of "bare danger man" as they pick out war zones from a map to strengthen their residency cases. Despite their experience they are glorious clichés of teenagers – drinking cheap cider, playing videogames, dressing like boy soldiers and fake rappers and child prostitutes and declaiming that music is their thing, yeah? The standout performances come from Zarrien Masieh

as a traumatised victim of the Taliban and Yasmin Mwanza as Zizidi, a young woman who despite having borne three children has never had a boyfriend. Of course, the blurring of boundaries between art and life is nothing new to social-realist filmmaking, but in this case the spectres of the actors' own stories haunt the narrative with a particular poignancy. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Kate Cook
Written by
Bruce Goodison
Co-writer
Charlotte Colbert
Director of Photography
Felix Wiedemann
Editor
Andrew Hulme

Production Designer

Chris Richmond
Soundtrack Written by
Alt-J
Sound Recordist
Mitch Low
Costume Designer
Emma Fryer

©Indefinite Films Ltd

Production Company

An Indefinite Films production
A film by Bruce Goodison
Executive Producers
Pippa Cross
Tina Cawte

CAST

Noof Ousellam
Omar
Masieh Zarrien
Abdul
Yasmin Mwanza
Zizidi
Farshid Rokey
5 Names
Melanie Wilder

Chloe Ntonga Tongo
Mwanza
Alpha
Toby Jones
Nigel Hapgood
Gloire Mbote
Big Man
Tressy Nzau
Umi

In Colour

Distributor
Indefinite Films

London, the present. Nigel Hapgood runs classes in a hostel for teenage refugees. His pupils include charismatic Afghan Omar; Zizidi, from Guinea, who is fleeing an abusive husband; and new arrival Abdul. The three teens have to negotiate the bureaucracy and occasional hostility of the British legal system as they seek leave to remain in the country.

During a residential outward-bound weekend run by Nigel, Abdul appears frightened of Omar and hints that he knows a secret about his past in Afghanistan. Zizidi faints. In hospital the full extent of her brutalisation becomes clear: she has been circumcised, burned, raped and forced to bear

three children by her husband and his friends.

At Omar's residency hearing, both Omar and Nigel lie under oath in order to strengthen his case. As they wait to hear the result, Zizidi learns that she has been refused leave to remain. When Omar receives a phone call to inform him that he can stay in the country, Abdul tells Nigel that Omar is a former Taliban collaborator, then stabs himself.

Christmas approaches and Omar visits Abdul in hospital to ask his forgiveness for his past actions. Back at the hostel, Abdul finds Zizidi dancing in the first snow she has ever seen. She assures him they will be all right.

Mariachi Gringo

USA/Mexico 2012
Director: Tom Gustafson

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

The path from Mexico to the United States is a well-travelled one, but relatively few dream of migrating in the opposite direction. It is the central paradox of Tom Gustafson's fish-out-of-water musical drama *Mariachi Gringo*, enshrined in its very title and in its bilingual opening credits (with the Spanish coming first), and also the spur for all manner of narrative surprises as protagonist Edward (Shawn Ashmore) insistently swims against the current in pursuit of an unexpected new identity.

Kansas born and bred and still living (in his late twenties) with his conservative parents when the film opens, Edward resists pressure to settle down with a white girl from his local church, instead hanging out with middle-aged Alberto, immigrant proprietor of the town's only Mexican restaurant, El Mariachi. Although Alberto has long since established new roots in America, he inspires Edward to make the inverse journey and become a mariachi in his own former hometown of Guadalajara. *The Wizard of Oz* is expressly if briefly mentioned here – but once Edward has found his true home and vocation abroad, he will, unlike the most famous Kansas resident to come of age in a colourful dreamland, never want to go back.


If Gustafson's debut feature *Were the World Mine* (2008) was an outspokenly gay musical, gay themes maintain a more oblique presence here. Edward is, by implication, straight, but the way in which he summons the courage to break free of his family's fixed values and find greater acceptance in a new community is a compelling allegory of coming out, decoded by a parallel subplot in which Edward's friend and impossible love interest Lilia (Martha Higareda) must weigh her mother's expectations against not just her desire to live in another country but also her lesbianism.

The utter incompatibility of Edward and Lilia's respective aspirations prevents *Mariachi*



Goin' south: Martha Higareda, Shawn Ashmore

Gringo from becoming either a clichéd opposites-attract romance or a glib fantasy about following your dreams. Rather, it traces the process of becoming true to oneself, with the exhilaration this entails but also the associated sadness and sacrifice. Scenes of Edward changing shirts form a recurrent motif in the film and signify a broader transformation, as this gringo in metamorphosis sloughs off one skin after another to find out which costume best fits who he really is underneath.

"Mariachi brings all kinds of people together," Alberto tells 'Eduardo'. "Poor, rich, young, old – even you and me." Accordingly, Gustafson uses his mariachi tracks to unify storylines (choreographed in well-edited montages) that transcend traditional boundaries of nationality, sexuality and class. The whole idea of an all-American white boy trying to pass as a traditional Mexican singer might seem preposterous, even a little insulting, but *Mariachi Gringo* is as sincere, committed and uncompromising as Edward himself. It also helps that Ashmore embodies this unlikely folk musician with real conviction, and can more than convincingly hold a tune. 

Miss Violence

Greece 2013
Director: Alexandros Avranas
Certificate 18 99m 24s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

It's intriguing to imagine how Alexandros Avranas might have pitched this to the impoverished Greek Film Centre when he applied for the subsidy which makes this kind of film possible. Perhaps as a cross between *Jeanne Dielman* and *A Serbian Film*? It seems unlikely that the project's actual ancestors (Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth*, 2009, and Michael Haneke *passim*) would have got a mention, but the director probably needed to play up the 'art-sleaze' angle rather than any social or political implications, since the only hope of recouping the film's cost was to achieve 'prestige' success and sales outside Greece. In the event, he hit paydirt when an unfathomable jury in Venice last year awarded the film two top prizes. Distribution deals like the one that brings the vile film to Britain have followed.

Miss Violence is one of those movies in which the director reveals bourgeois normalcy to be the thinnest of veneers over a cesspit of moral and spiritual pollution. The unnamed family at its centre – a stern patriarch and his taciturn wife, their high-strung daughter and her four fatherless children, reduced to three by the 11-year-old Angeliki's suicide in the opening scene – are hardly paragons of normalcy to begin with, but Avranas chronicles their daily domestic routines with dogged persistence. The suicide scene alerts us from the off to the level of contrivance we can expect. One moment Angeliki is dancing with her grandfather to Leonard Cohen's 'Dance Me to the End of Love', and the next she's throwing herself off the balcony, with improbable serenity. Just as we're thinking that Leonard Cohen is more likely a directorial imposition than the family's favourite CD, there's a cut to dead silence at the moment of Angeliki's jump. The sheer crudity of the director's choices is maintained throughout as he belabours the dysfunctionality of the household and gradually reveals its underlying depravity.

Does it surprise anyone to learn that the dirty secret is prostitution? Since this isn't *Jeanne Dielman*, and since awareness of immorality has moved on since Chantal Akerman made that classic in 1975, prostitution alone isn't enough to give Avranas the 'shock value' he's looking for. So Grandpa here pimps his granddaughters to local paedophiles as soon as they turn 11, and enlists the even younger Alkmini when Angeliki puts herself out of the picture. He has clearly been doing the same to his daughter Eleni for years, and insisting that she keeps her incidental pregnancies to provide more paedophile-bait. This revelation certainly provokes disgust, but whether it's disgust at the fact of paedophiles raping young girls or disgust at a director with the ethics of a tabloid editor is moot.

The psychological issues are left off-screen: what makes Grandpa do this, and why does it take the pimping of little Alkmini to make Grandma strike back after years of silence? Maybe Angela Merkel is to blame? A desultory subplot about Grandpa getting and losing a job suggests that economic factors are in play, and Grandpa pays the 14-year-old Myrto only €30 for allowing men to sodomise her, so presumably charges them a lot more. The most obnoxious aspect of all is the title's suggestion that the silent

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alejandra Cárdenas
Tom Gustafson
Cory Krueckeberg

Written by
Cory Krueckeberg
Rafael Cuervo
Ramiro Ruiz

Director of Photography
Kira Kelly

Edited by
Cory Krueckeberg
Jennifer Lee

Production Design
Dario Carreto

Original Music
Tim Sandusky

Sound Design
Javier Umpiérrez

Costume Designer
Malena de la Riva

Production Companies
Sin Sentido Films & SPEAKproductions
present in association with New Art

Laboratories, SEPROE, SETUJAL EFD, Le Grand Films & The Group Entertainment a Gustafson/Krueckeberg film
Made with fiscal stimulus article 226 of the LISR (EFICINE)

Bonafont, Herdez, Casa Herradura & Garnier

Executive Producers
Gill Holland
Ambrose Roche
Isabella Smejda

CAST

Shawn Ashmore
Edward
Martha Higareda
Lilia
Fernando Becerril
Alberto
Lila Downs
Sophia
Kate Burton
Anne
Tom Wopat
Ron
Yareli Arizmendi

Rosario
Teresa Ruiz
Ashlee
Deanna Dunagan
Monica
Adriana Barraza
Magdalena

In Colour
[LBS:1]

Distributor
Ballpark Film
Distributors

Kansas, present day. Sad, single, unemployed 29-year-old Edward still lives with his conservative Christian parents, and has largely given up both his guitar and his childhood dream of running away with a band. His only refuge from his stifling home life is the town's Mexican restaurant, El Mariachi. Its owner, Alberto, who followed his dreams north to the US, regales Edward with stories of the mariachi life in his childhood home, Guadalajara. He teaches Edward some mariachi songs and advises him to follow his own dream with confidence. After Alberto has a stroke, Edward (now turned 30) decides to head to Guadalajara and become a mariachi.

As he finds his feet and expands his musical repertoire, Edward is befriended by local waitress Lilia and her mariachi friend Sophia. Edward's growing love for Lilia is thwarted both by her dream of resuming her studies in California and by her homosexuality. Edward successfully auditions for a big mariachi band, only to realise that they are less interested in harnessing his musical talent than in exploiting his novelty status for commercial reasons. After one triumphant performance as their 'Mariachi Gringo' frontman, he quits. Hearing of Alberto's death, Edward returns home to pour a libation at the older man's grave.

Back in Guadalajara, Edward learns that Lilia has returned to California. He performs with Sophia's mariachi band in a small village.

Mistaken for Strangers

USA 2013

Director: Tom Berninger



Residential evil: Reni Pittaki

victim is more 'violent' than the perps, a thesis floated by Avranas in his note for the presskit. Even Michael Haneke might balk at that. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Vasilis Chrysanthopoulos
Alexandros Avranas

Script Writers

Alexandros Avranas
Kostas Peroulis

Director of

Photography

Olympia Mytilinaiou

Editor

Nikos Helidonides

Art Directors

Eva Manidaki
Thanassis Demiris

Sound Recordist

Nikos Bougioukos

Costume Designer

Despina Chimona

©Falio House
Productions,
plays2place

productions,
Alexandros Avranas

Production

Companies

Falio House,
plays2place

With the support
of the Greek

Film Center

Executive Producer

Christos V.
Konstantakopoulos

CAST

Themis Panou

father

Reni Pittaki

mother

Eleni Roussinou

Eleni

Sissy Toumasi

Myrto

Kalliopi Zontanou

Alkmini

Konstantinos

Athanasiades

Filippos

Chloe Bolota

Angeliki

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome
Distribution Ltd



Band of brothers: Tom Berninger, Matt Berninger

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton


Mistaken for Strangers is a very well-made badly made documentary. It is a rock doc about the band The National, but made up of the bits that would've been thrown away in a straight movie, the off-guard moments before an official interview begins, the furtive shots of shoes soundtracked to the angry words that follow the command to "Turn off the camera."

In fact, the documentary's principal subject isn't even in the band – it's the film's director, Tom Berninger, the younger brother of frontman Matt Berninger. In one of the band's signature songs, 'Mr November', Matt sings "I used to be carried in the arms of cheerleaders" – and you can believe that this lyric has some basis in real experience. Referred to by one band member as the "golden boy", Mat has the air of a prep-school ex-jock. Approaching 40 at the time the film was made and starting to look a bit like William Hurt, Matt has a dandyish propensity for blazers and waistcoats. He doesn't look like a man who has a reputation for putting on

explosive live shows, though he does manage to channel his inner Iggy after quaffing glass after glass of white wine on stage. Tom, shaggy and stout where his brother is lean, is more of a beer drinker, his personal style inclining towards T-shirts – even in the swimming pool, where we see him harassing one of Matt's celebrity neighbours in Los Angeles ("Hey, Moby!").

Hired as a roadie for a 2010 tour, Tom films The National in Europe and in the US – right up to the point when he's fired after one screw-up too many. If Tom manages to capture his subjects unguarded and catch a certain amount of candour with his clumsy, unprepared interviews, it's probably because no one honestly believes he's capable of completing a movie and it's therefore unlikely that the footage will ever be seen. But Tom – or someone involved here – is foxier than they're letting on, for *Mistaken for Strangers* is a quite natively turned-out shaggy-brother story, petitioning the sympathy of the viewer while moving along on its redemptive arc. An amateur moviemaker whose previous productions are low-budget splatter movies, Tom prunes his story to fit successful documentary templates, playing a more coherent version of Mike Schank in 1999's *American Movie*, a less hopeless overshadowed Charles to brother Robert in 1994's *Crumb*.

Despite its trappings of naivety, *Mistaken for Strangers* is sophisticated enough to play the self-reflexive card, owning up to what it's doing even as it goes about doing it. The last half-hour of the film revolves around Tom's attempts to form his footage into a functioning feature, before striking on the idea of making his movie into the self-critical exercise that we see here. Any deviation on the standard band-doc formula is a welcome one, though the final product feels stretched at 75 minutes. Even then there's much filler between the handful of choice moments – that "Hey, Moby!"; Tom calling out Matt's mock-modesty while the latter strikes messianic poses for a photo shoot; or when Tom seems to discover that a little brother's jealousy has something in common with the overshadowing of The Band by The Frontman.

Mistaken for Strangers is fully a family affair – the credited co-editor, with Tom, is Matt's wife Carin Besser, a former editor at *The New Yorker*, which ran a promo piece about the documentary in its 'Talk of the Town' section. Further proof, if any were needed, that making a name in art is all about who you know. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Matt Berninger
Carin Besser
Craig Charland

Edited by

Tom Berninger
Carin Besser

Music

The National
Re-recording Mixer
Paul Hsu

©American Mary

Productions, LLC

Production

Companies

American Mary
Productions

in association
with Price Hill

Entertainment
A film by Tom
Berninger

Executive Producer

Marshall Curry

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

US, 2010. Tom Berninger is the younger brother of Matt Berninger, the frontman of the band The National. Matt hires Tom to work as a roadie on the group's new tour. Tom decides to record the band on and off stage as they play dates across Europe, but his intrusive filming becomes a source of increasing tension with Tom. After a New York date, Tom fails to make it on to the departing tour bus and is fired. He returns home to Cincinnati, where he lives with his parents, who comment on the differences between their sons.

Some months later, Matt and his wife invite Tom to come to Brooklyn to finish his movie. After a work-in-progress screening falls apart because of technical difficulties, Tom reworks the material, making his own story and his failings an essential part of the narrative. When we last see the brothers, Tom is holding the mic cord for Matt as he prowls the theatre during a live performance.

Greece, present day. During her 11th birthday party with her family in their city apartment, Angeliki calmly jumps to her death from the balcony. Her grandparents and her single mother Eleni are questioned by the police, which upsets Eleni more than the suicide did. Dominated by the strongly patriarchal grandfather, the family tries to reassert its 'normality' in preparation for the inevitable visit from social workers. Angeliki's elder sister Myrto and younger siblings Philippos and Alkmini resume schooling. A visit to the gynaecologist establishes that Eleni is pregnant again; she says her husband has deserted them. Grandpa takes a low-paying job but loses it when his intransigent employer won't give him time off for childminding. Grandpa prostitutes the 14-year-old Myrto to two men and rapes her himself before taking her home; Myrto angrily tells him that she provoked Angeliki's suicide by telling her that she would be prostituted soon after her birthday. Two unsympathetic social workers visit and inspect the apartment. Undaunted, Grandpa takes little Alkmini to visit a middle-aged man who sexually abuses her. That night, Grandma stabs Grandpa to death in his bed. Next morning she convenes the others in the living room and tells Eleni to lock the door.

Oculus

Director: Mike Flanagan
Certificate 15 103m 16s

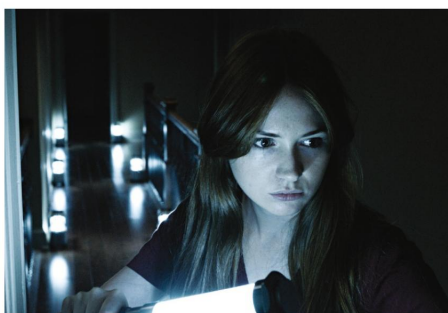
Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The 'villain' of *Oculus* is a sinister rococo antique mirror that once, we're told, hung in Balmoral Castle. The mirror houses a hostile ghost, and its frame squirms with tendrils of dark wood. Every bit as overwrought is the storyline of Mike Flanagan's spook tale – though its craftsmanship is undeniable. I'd probably have to watch *Oculus* a second time to be sure that it made some kind of sense, and I can't imagine the circumstances under which I'd want to do that.

That isn't to say that *Oculus* is a badly made movie – it's just that I'd rather not go back to the old house. Which is exactly what Kaylie Russell (Karen Gillan) does, returning with her younger brother Tim (Brenton Thwaites) to the suburban home where their parents and their innocence died 11 years earlier. For a moment, when Kaylie reveals the surveillance set-up she's prepared in order to document the supernatural forces emanating from the mirror, it looks as if we're in for another reality/found-footage horror – but Flanagan has something else in mind, and through the trials to come he manoeuvres the widescreen frame with unusual dexterity, signifying complex shifts in the timeline with a simple rack focus.


Oculus is, again, not a badly made movie – just a deeply unpleasant one. Flanagan, who co-wrote the screenplay, creates a closed, claustrophobic universe in which any good or decent thing is inevitably tainted – a bite of an apple turns into a bloody mouthful of broken glass, a mother's embrace can prove fatal. Recovery from past trauma is a sham at best, and the same awful things that happened before will happen all over again.

Oculus consists of two parallel narratives. One deals with the adult Tim and Kaylie – she's introduced with a tracking shot that follows her red ponytail bouncing from side to side as she walks with metronomic rhythm, a shorthand communicating her fussbudget character's



Reflected gory: Karen Gillan

fiercely self-imposed control. The other narrative revisits the events of 11 years earlier, with child performers Garrett Ryan and Annalise Basso, as the younger Tim and Kaylie, throwing themselves headlong into some rough stuff. As Kaylie and Tim's investigation continues, their disorientation increases, the present and the past winding more and more tightly together until it's unclear who is suffering through what. The possibility that this is all happening in the Russell siblings' heads is teased at but left unresolved – any break in perspective would compromise the film's stifling atmosphere.

Oculus, which netted a tidy return Stateside on a modest budget, is an embellishment of Flanagan's 2006 short *Oculus: Chapter 3 – The Man with the Plan*. It was produced under the auspices of WWE Studios, who have become a somewhat unlikely source for solid, low-budget, no-stars genre fare such as last year's *The Call* (I say "somewhat unlikely" because WWE stands for "World Wrestling Entertainment"). *Oculus* is exactly that: it's not a sophisto on-the-couch deconstruction of the ghost story in the manner of 2011's *Silent House*, but a head-scrumbling catalogue of instantly recognisable fears that's every bit as subtle as a ripped-off fingernail – an appetising image of which is contained therein. I told you it was nasty. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Trevor Macy
Marc D. Evans

Written by

Mike Flanagan
Jeff Howard
Based on the short film *Oculus: The Man with the Plan* written by Mike Flanagan,
Jeff Siedman

Director of Photography

Michael Fimognari

Edited by

Mike Flanagan

Production Designer

Russell Barnes

Music

The Newton Brothers

Sound Mixer

Michael 'Koffy' Koff

Costume Designer

Lynn Falconer

Production

Companies

Relativity Media
and Intrepid
Pictures present
in association with
MICA Entertainment
and WWE Studios
a BH Productions
presentation

Executive Producers

Dale Johnson
Glenn Murray
Julie May

Mike Ilitch Jr
Anil Kurian
Ryan Kavanaugh
Tucker Tooley
D. Scott Lumpkin
Peter Schlessel
Jason Blum
Michael J. Luisi

CAST

Karen Gillan
Kaylie Russell

Brenton Thwaites

Tim Russell
Katee Sackhoff
Marie Russell
Rory Cochrane
Alan Russell
Annalise Basso
young Kaylie
Garrett Ryan
young Tim
James Lafferty
Michael Dumont
Miguel Sandoval

Dr Shawn Graham

Kate Siegel
Marisol Chavez
Scott Graham
Warren

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

US, present day. On his 21st birthday, Tim Russell is released from the mental hospital where he has been since his parents died in an undisclosed tragedy some years before. He goes to live with his older sister Kaylie.

Through her job at an auction house, Kaylie obtains a large antique mirror which, 11 years earlier, had hung in the Russell family house. Kaylie is convinced that it is haunted and was responsible for driving her parents mad. She has traced its provenance and documented many similar tragedies that have befallen its owners. Persuading Tim to accompany her, she returns the mirror to the family house, where she has created a controlled environment to monitor and record the supernatural phenomena emanating from it. Tim tries to convince Kaylie that she is suffering from

the same delusions that once tormented him – until her point is seemingly proved by the evidence.

As Tim and Kaylie lose their grip on reality, the present is intercut with flashbacks to the events of 11 years ago: their father, under the influence of the mirror, which hung in his office, tortured and killed their mother, before he was shot by Tim in self-defence. These remembered horrors blend with Tim and Kaylie's contemporary hallucinations until finally Tim lets loose a pendulum that is meant to shatter the mirror in case of emergency. His vision has been clouded by his delusional mental state, however, and the blow intended for the mirror instead hits Kaylie's head, killing her. The police arrive and lead Tim away, as simultaneously we see the younger Tim being led away 11 years earlier.

Of Horses and Men

Iceland/Germany/Norway 2013
Director: Benedikt Erlingsson

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

Over the past several years it seems that Hollywood has discovered the alien beauty of Iceland, seizing on the vaguely otherworldly quality of its sprawling ashen hills and tar-black beaches and putting them to work as locales beyond the stars in films such as *Prometheus* and *Star Trek Into Darkness*.

It's refreshing, then, to see Iceland play itself, and indeed one of the most appealing things about Benedikt Erlingsson's debut feature *Of Horses and Men* is its familiar indulgence in the country's more natural splendour. (The national tourism board will no doubt applaud Erlingsson's efforts.) This is Iceland as seen through domestic eyes, rendered not as some cosmic curiosity but rather as a homely place where people live, work and ride horses. This last activity in particular proves of great importance to the film. *Of Horses and Men* is, in essence, a mosaic of loosely related vignettes, and aside from their setting these stories have only one thing in common: each revolves around short-legged Icelandic ponies and the travails of the hapless locals who aspire to tame and ride them. Think of it as a sort of equine-themed *Magnolia* with a broader comic bent.

Erlingsson's idiosyncratic sense of humour is illustrated succinctly by the film's opening scene, which juxtaposes the absurd with the macabre to highly unusual effect. We are introduced to Kolbeinn (Ingvar E. Sigurdsson), a respected figure among the residents of his small Icelandic hamlet, as he makes a grand display of a newly acquired white mare. Trotting it out across town in a ritualistic display, Kolbeinn has the attention and admiration of his every neighbour – none more than Solveig (Charlotte Bøving), who eyes the rider amorously. First comes farce: an enormous stallion breaks free of his wire pen and charges off after the apparently irresistible mare, mounting her from behind with Kolbeinn still indignantly in the saddle. (That this impromptu sex act is a stand-in for what Solveig wishes Kolbeinn would do to her is as crass as it is obvious.) Then comes tragedy: his mare summarily rendered worthless, Kolbeinn sheds a tear and shoots her.



Horse code: Ingvar E. Sigurdsson

112 Weddings

USA/Germany 2014
Director: Doug Block
Certificate PG 95m 7s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Theatrical documentaries rarely tackle the subject of marriage head-on. At a guess it's because reality TV's fascination with weddings and precarious celebrity pairings keeps the subject hopelessly overexposed, in everything from *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* to the endlessly spawning Kardashian and *The Real Housewives* series. Big-screen documentaries prefer to feature marriage as part of a bigger tale (Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell*, for example, or the partnership fuelling *The Queen of Versailles*). Undeterred, documentary filmmaker Doug Block has already patiently unpicked his parents' complex marriage in the wonderfully raw and revelatory family memoir *51 Birch Street*. Here he's burrowing into other people's unions, driven by curiosity about what happened after some of the 112 weddings he's filmed during his 20-year sideline as a wedding videographer.

Wider and of necessity shallower than the deep-digging *51 Birch Street* (2005), these portraits of nine marriages are varied, contradictory and engaging. But the film feels simultaneously overambitious (what goes into staying married is just one impossible question that Block's narration poses) and a bit thin. Consultations with a lesbian couple on the "privilege of marriage" and with a smart-talking rabbi on its pitfalls seem like cursory attempts to widen the net. They don't compensate for the fact that trying to answer big questions from a small sample elicits only truisms, such as when a mildly exasperated husband blames the nearly 50 per cent divorce rate on the bogus idea of 'soul mates' undermining the messy, challenging reality.

That said, Block's interviews capture a sharp snapshot of each marriage, as couples talk across, shut down or bolster one another. His gentle, open-ended questioning creates shifting spaces that partners fill with their (often competing) narratives. Every marriage contains two stories – watch Michael hymn his contentment, across wife Jodi's stoical admission that their daughter's learning disability has cost her a career. But even common experiences such as parenthood are viewed wildly differently – it's seen by exhausted Augie as near-fatally sapping his marriage, whereas the candid parents of a child



Ringin' the changes: 112 Weddings

with a brain tumour see it as cementing theirs.

Block uses his cache of each couple's *cinéma vérité* wedding footage tellingly, to highlight the yawning gap between expectation and outcome. This time-capsule element is captivating, sometimes prophetic (David, whose manic depression will tank his marriage, shows off a rattling pharmacopeia of pre-wedding medication), but the compare-and-contrast structure eventually becomes rote. So too does the visual contrast between the giddy roaming footage of the weddings and the pinned-down sofa stakeouts of the marital interviews, though the latter elicit extraordinarily frank admissions. Prurience is absent, though, due to Block's empathy for all his interviewees; in the case of Sue and Steve, a devastated near-divorcee and her unfaithful husband, he doesn't play favourites.

A strong whiff of sadder-and-wiser pervades the proceedings, even for those marriages still afloat. Which is, one suspects, why the film includes a pair of new weddings to lighten the mood a little – there's a quietly funny sequence in which young lovers Heather and Sam survive their family and friend's tradition of single-sex 'advice circles' on their wedding morning. Surprisingly, the pair most thoughtful and voluble about marriage are Janice and Alexander, happily unwed on principle for 13 years and vehemently opposed to the "possession" of matrimony. To be "safe and wise" for their children they finally replace their original hippie partnership pledge with the simplest of weddings: "We're still free emotionally. But marriage also makes a little bit of sense." 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Fridrik Þór Fridriksson	Hughrif, Filmhuset	Kjartan Ragnarsson Grimur
Screenplay Benedikt Erlingsson	Supported by Icelandic Film Centre	Helgi Björnsson Egill
Director of Photography Bergsteinn Björgulffsson	Producers Erlingur Gíslason	Sigríður María Egilsdóttir Johanna
Editor David Alexander Corno	Benedikt Erlingsson	Juan Camillo Roman Estrada Juan
Production Designer Siggí Óli Pálmason	Hjalti Gudmundsson	
Music David Thór Jónsson	Kjartan Sveinsson	
Sound Design Fredrik Sturluson	Bjarni Óssurason	
Costume Designer Þórunn María Jónsdóttir	Sigrún Thorgeirsdóttir	
	Lilja Óssurardóttir	
	Bjarni H. Ásbjörnsson	
	Arnór Björnsson	
	Sigríður Ásta Eythórsdóttir	
	Sigurður Gísli Pálmason	
	Jón Pálmason	
	Lilja Pálmadóttir	

CAST

Ingvar E. Sigurdsson
Kolbeinn
Charlotte Böving
Solveig
Steinn Ármann Magnússon
Vernhardur

Rural Iceland, present day. Kolbeinn, an esteemed local dignitary, rides an unbroken mare across the moors, earning the admiration of his neighbours, especially Solveig. Kolbeinn's ride is interrupted when a stallion in a nearby enclosure breaks free and gives chase through the hills, eventually mounting the in-heat mare with Kolbeinn still on it. Kolbeinn returns home in shame and shoots the now impregnated horse. Meanwhile local drunkard Vernhardur guides a horse into the sea towards a fishing boat that he believes to be carrying vodka; given a much purer alcohol in its place, Vernhardur swims back to shore, drinks copiously and dies. At his funeral, Solveig becomes jealous of the attention paid to Vernhardur's widow by Kolbeinn. Later, the curmudgeonly Grimur begins cutting the barbed-wire fences erected by his neighbour. He flees on horseback as his neighbour chases after him in a tractor trailer. A piece of the wire lashes across Grimur's face, blinding him, and in the confusion he guides his horse directly into the path of his neighbour's tractor. The neighbour swerves, drives his tractor off a steep hill and dies. Finally, we cut to Juan, a tourist on a riding tour who has been left behind in the remote hills. In the cold of the night, he resorts to carving a sleeping bag for himself out of his horse's warm stomach. The film ends with a reunion of these characters at a town party.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Doug Block	Editor Doug Block	©112 Weddings, LLC
Written by Doug Block	Original Music Jon Foy	Production Companies A Copacetic Pictures and Hard Working
Co-writer Maevé O'Boyle	Sound Edit/Mix Margaret Crimmins	Movies production in association with HBO Documentary
Cinematography	Greg Smith	

Films and ZDF in co-operation with Arte
A film by Doug Block
Supported by the TFI Documentary Fund
A sponsored project of the Independent Filmmaker Project

Executive Producers
Sheila Nevins
for BBC:
Nick Fraser
Kate Townsend
for ZDF/Arte:
Martin Peiper

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Distributor
Dogwoof

New York, present day. Documentary maker Doug Block has videoed 112 weddings over 20 years. To examine what goes into staying married, he revisits nine couples. The demands of parenthood nearly broke Jenn and Augie's marriage but satisfy Rachel and Paul. Olivia and Dennis reveal that their daughter's life-threatening illness rocked and then strengthened their bond. A child's learning disability has shaped Jodi and Michael's marriage. Dismissing the idea of soul mates, Yoonhee and Tom muse on their enduring marriage. Illustrating a US divorce rate of nearly 50 per cent, manic-depressive David confesses to wrecking his

marriage. Long-married Sue and Steve give separate accounts of a wrenching break-up. Block's narration considers the institution itself: Rabbi Jonathan sees its highs and lows as a life challenge, while lesbians Anna and Erica want its privileges. Long-time partners Janice and Alexander overcome their strong objections to matrimony, and Heather and her fiancé Sam share their wedding plans. Adam holds his marriage to Danielle together despite her clinical depression. Janice and Alexander are finally married quietly at home, and Sam and Heather experience traditional 'advice circles' before marrying in a Montana field.

The 100-year-old Man Who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared

Sweden/Germany/The Netherlands/Norway 2013, Director: Felix Herngren, Certificate 15 114m 20s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The decision to set the Swedish release date for Christmas Day last year would seem to say something about the kind of film this is – as does its distribution by the Nordic arm of Disney. But with its R15-rating and a body count worthy of its trendier cousin, the Scandinavian thriller, *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared* is neither family-friendly nor festally uplifting.


An adaptation of the hit debut novel by Jonas Jonasson, the film is – true to its title – about an elderly man who escapes from his care home on his 100th birthday. His cork-soled, orthopaedic mules bear his name in marker-pen: Allan. An amateur explosives expert in earlier life, he is now adrift in lake-striated Sweden. But aimlessness is Allan's game, and even in his younger years he let himself be led, believing, as his mother coached: "Life is what it is, and will turn out as it will." Flashbacks show how the younger Allan – passive by principle, apolitical to a fault – tangled with some of the most infamous and influential figures of the 20th century. In the race for nuclear arms, war-mongering leaders tried to buy his pyrotechnics expertise with carousing or, in Stalin's case, with Cossack dance.

The two narrative strands, past and present, come together at the film's conclusion, when the son of one of Allan's powerful allies, the Russian physicist Popov, lifts the old man clear of pandemonium. The mayhem Allan leaves behind includes a missing-person search, a raft of dead bodies and a biker gang baying for blood.

We've seen this kind of material brought to the screen before – but always, when successfully, with a distinctive sense of style. Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Delicatessen* (1991), for example, is a fish-eyed, sewer-dark, futuristic farce, inspired by the films of Terry Gilliam. Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995) mixes

similar elements – political satire and cavorting, cartoonish central characters – and brings them under one banner with the Balkan-tavern sound of a promenading brass orchestra. *The Hundred-Year-Old Man* is without style. Director Felix Herngren packages the black and slapstick comedy with grandstanding CG images (of a cargo aircraft, a submarine and a gulag camp in flames) but they don't blend. Herngren's angle on the humour likewise lacks coordination: he plays up the gory effects at the expense of other types of gag, which leads to the exclusion of the film's (as I understand) real audience: a younger, sillier one. What's intended as irreverent is occasionally offensive. The many and inventive deaths – by firing squad, decapitation, French bangers, a freezer unit – gall with repetition, and a particularly tasteless section of script places the young Allan in the care of a racial biologist and castrates him for having "Negroid measurements" after an examination of his cranium and genitals.

Some things, though, are out of Herngren's hands. It's a problem with the narrative and Allan's persona that there's nothing and no one to feel for. It's pure caper – and this wears thin with no heart or fire underpinning it. Allan is pathologically, philosophically and, post-sterilisation, physically placid. Dim-witted, disengaged, loveless and sexless, he's a trundling blank in youth and infirmity, and hard to get behind. (And besides, he's almost finished – as he says himself to the biker-gang boss: "If you want to kill me you better hurry, because I'm 100 years old.") This may not be the fault of the book entirely but it's a weakness made apparent by the unfunny Robert Gustafsson (Allan), who is nonetheless Sweden's best-loved comedian.

Perhaps the picaresque plot and the protagonist after *Candide* recommend themselves to animated rather than live-action adaptation. Still, I'd not be surprised if the film were remade with Will Ferrell the star. Whatever – this version makes clear that paperback escapism for the commuter doesn't do for the cinemagoer without a reimagining for the whole other medium of film. 

Robert Gustafsson



Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Malte Forsell
Felix Herngren
Henrik Jansson-Schweizer
Patrick Nebout
Script
Felix Herngren
Hans Ingemansson
Based on the book by Jonas Jonasson
Cinematographer
Göran Hallberg
Editor
Henrik Källberg
Production Design
Mikael Varhelyi
Composer

Matti Bye
Sound Design
Mattias Eklund
Costume Design
Madeleine Kihlbom Thor
©NICE FLX Pictures
Production Companies
Buena Vista International
Sweden, NICE FLX Pictures present in co-production with Buena Vista International
Sweden, Nordsvensk

Filmunderhållning, TV4, Film i Väst
In association with Tele München Gruppe, Wild Bunch Benelux Distribution, C More Entertainment, Nordisk Film & TV Fond
Produced by NICE FLX Pictures
With the support of Swedish Film Institute, Nordisk Film & TV Fond
Executive Producers
Maria Dahlin Pontus Swegen

Thomas Hedberg
Joni Sighvatsson

CAST

Robert Gustafsson
Allan Karlsson
Mia Skäringer
Gunilla
Iwar Wiklander
Julius
David Wiberg
Benny
Jens Hultén
Gäddan
Ralph Carlsson
Chief Inspector Aronsson

David Shackleton
Herbert Einstein
Georg Nikoloff
Popov
Alan Ford
Pim

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

For UK prints, dialogue is in Swedish with English subtitles, and main voice-over is dubbed into English by Robert Gustafsson

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

Swedish theatrical title
Hundraåringen som klev ut genom fönstret och försvann
Onscreen English title
The 100-year-old Man Who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared

Sweden, present day. Dynamite enthusiast Allan escapes from his retirement home on his 100th birthday. He picks up another man's suitcase before taking a bus to a neighbouring village. Unbeknown to Allan, the suitcase contains a large amount of drug money. The biker gang responsible for its shipment to Bali goes after him. Meanwhile police launch a search for Allan. Flashbacks to Allan's past catalogue

his encounters with 20th-century world leaders.

Allan meets a stationmaster who accidentally kills the thug from whom Allan took the suitcase. He joins Allan on the run. A mature student and a woman who keeps an elephant also join Allan's adventure. Together they are indirectly responsible for the deaths of further gang members but are eventually rescued by a well-connected friend from Allan's past.

The Other Woman

USA 2014

Director: Nick Cassavetes


Certificate 12A 109m 4s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Once upon a time in Hollywood movies, a straying husband was the signal for a cat fight, best exemplified by Norma Shearer taking on a predatory perfume girl in *The Women* (1939). Now, according to Nick Cassavetes's glossy faux-feminist farce, it's an opportunity for girl bonding, gross-out humiliations and personal growth, as lawyer Carly (Cameron Diaz) and housewife Kate (Leslie Mann) team up to avenge themselves on adulterous Mark.

A prosaic and less witty reworking of 1996's *The First Wives Club*, the film pitches itself as a member of the new woman-centred comedy sorority, whose charter members include *Bridesmaids*, *The Heat*, *Bachelorette* and *Pitch Perfect*. Yet it can only create the sketchiest and most unlikely female characters, Melissa K. Stack's broad-brush script stereotyping the leads respectively as a chic, ruthless law-robot and a ditsy, panicking housewife. It barely outlines Amber, Mark's second mistress (Kate Upton's blankly amiable beach bunny), who is recruited in makeweight fashion to create an avenging trio because she has aphrodisiac sweat and is "super-hot, it brings up our group average".

Utterly lacking that seam of personal pain that sharpened *Bridesmaids* or the raucous rivalry of *Pitch Perfect*, the film casts Carly and Kate's unlikely alliance as a drunken thirtysomething copy of teen friendship, in which they braid each other's hair and giggle over the laxative, depilatory and female-hormone punishments secretly inflicted on Mark. No matter that Nicolaj Coster-Waldau's panicking yuppie Lothario can't wring any laughs from his body-shaming predicaments; unlike the role-reversal revenge pranking of the vintage female vengeance comedy *Nine to Five* (1980), his trials don't even ratchet up or mirror his transgressions amusingly.

Humour is in short supply all round, as neither Stack nor Cassavetes (who is best known for melodramas such as *The Notebook* and *My Sister's Keeper*) displays any comic facility here. One flabby, gabbily dialogued scene simply slides into another, accompanied by music cues of sledgehammer subtlety (spying on Mark is accompanied by the *Mission Impossible* theme, betrayal by 'Love Is a Battlefield'). This is comedy by numbers, with Mann spinning out shrill screwball scenes and Diaz allotted random slapstick interludes of pratfalls and ungainly chases. These stale set-ups ensure that the undeniable comic abilities of both actresses are never properly utilised. Obligatory gross-out moments with both dog and husband defecating noisily take the film (and possibly the genre) to a pointless new low. The notion of 



Sister dredge: Kate Upton, Cameron Diaz



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what's funny here is just *more* of everything – repeating Kate's panic attacks or Amber's jiggly slo-mo movements, and overstretching physical gags (there's a two-people-in-a-bush yoga scene that feels longer than Lent). In the final confrontation, this inability to substitute quality for quantity results in a particularly unedifying ordeal of smirking versus raging, while Mark smashes up a glass-walled office until the sequence simply runs out of steam.

In the absence of laughs, there's plenty of time to ponder the film's underlying theme, which is a frenetic fetishisation of female friendship. So much so that *The Other Woman* is structured as Kate and Carly's platonic same-sex romantic comedy, all the way from the doorstep-revelation meet cute through fighting, fondness and misunderstandings to a happy-ever-after BFF-status, with Amber as their adorable pet. Though they all receive shiny life-rewards (a career for Kate, a boyfriend for Carly, the dubious honour of partnering Carly's womanising father for Amber), the film's headiest moment celebrates the romantic intimacy of friendship in a sunset cuddle on the sands. Pals before paramours, it seems. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Julie Yorn
Written by
Melissa K. Stack
Director of Photography
Robert Fraisse
Film Editors
Alan Heim
Jim Flynn
Production Designer
Dan Davis
Music
Aaron Zigman
Production Sound Mixer
Tod A. Maitland
Costume Designers
Patricia Field
Paolo Nieddu

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Korea and Spain)
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Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents an LBI Entertainment production
Made in association with TSG Entertainment
Executive Producers
Donald J. Lee Jr
Chuck Pacheco

CAST

Cameron Diaz
Carly Whitten

Leslie Mann
Kate King
Kate Upton
Amber
Nikolaj Coster-Waldau
Mark King
Nicki Minaj
Lydia
Taylor Kinney
Phil
Don Johnson
Frank
David Thornton
Nick
Victor Cruz
Fernando
Dolby Digital/Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

New York, present day. High-flying lawyer Carly finds out that her new boyfriend Mark is married when she makes a surprise visit to his house. Devastated, his wife Kate first reproaches Carly, then befriends her. They bond over Mark's duplicity but keep their discoveries from him. He uses Kate's ideas to identify likely start-ups for venture capital. Trailing Mark to the Hamptons reveals another mistress, young Amber, whom Kate and Carly recruit. The three agree on a revenge campaign, secretly inflicting female hormones, hair remover and laxatives on Mark. Carly discovers that he has embezzled money from his employers. Kate weakens after she sleeps with Mark, and she breaks with the mistresses. However, she rejoins them when she discovers that Mark has hidden the money in the Bahamas in her name. The three women travel to the Bahamas and withdraw the money. Back in New York, they confront Mark, who angrily smashes up a glass conference room. Kate becomes CEO of a start-up company. Carly dates Kate's builder brother. Amber pairs up with Carly's father.

Plastic

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Julian Gilbey
Certificate 15 101m 56s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Purportedly based on a true story, this youth-oriented crime caper gives us plenty of tips on how to operate a stolen credit-card scam but little reason to root for the twentysomethings hoping to defraud the financial services industry.

The calculation seems to be that, post-crash, we will be cheering on Ed Speleers's alpha-male Sam and his twitchy associate Yatesy (Alfie Allen, overdoing the coke-fuelled psychosis), or at least sympathising with them when they get on the wrong side of a Polish 'Mr Big' (Thomas Kretschmann, adequate) and have to pull off a massive haul to save their skins. It certainly doesn't play that way, and with director Julian Gilbey detained by reams of exposition, there's little room left to give the gang much charm or even diverting banter. What remains is a soulless, utterly uninvolved exercise in plot-spinning, capped by a final reel that's an outrageous catalogue of convenient coincidence. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Graham Kirkham
Martin Hughes
Daniel Toland
Chris Howard
Sandro Forte
Frank Mannion
Terry Stone
Screenplay
Julian Gilbey
Will Gilbey
Chris Howard
Director of Photography
Peter Wignall
Edited by
Julian Gilbey
Will Gilbey
Production Designer
Matthew Button
Original Music
Chad Hobson
Production Sound Mixer
John Hayes
Costume Designer
Andrew Cox

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Production Companies
Paramount Pictures and Meridian Films present a Gateway Films production
Executive Producers
Eugene Hickey

Michael Irwin
Miki Sytner
Simon Dudley
Jack Dudley
Chris Rokos
Chris Warner
Alan Wallis
Brian Gray
Nia Syson
Ian Dee
Anil Samani
Nick Gamble
Gwyn Powell
Tony Jimenez
Mike Diamond
Terry Byrne
Nick Simunek
Darren Baggett
Ajay Chawla
Ata Shobeiry

CAST

Ed Speleers
Sam
Alfie Allen
Yatesy
Will Poulter
Fordy
Sebastian De Souza
Rafa
Emma Rigby
Frankie
Mem Ferda
Tariq
Graham McTavish
Dawson
Thomas Kretschmann
Marcel

London, present day. Sam masterminds a credit-card scam in which university students Fordy, Yatesy and Rafa sell stolen items on campus. Yatesy and Rafa steal a laptop belonging to Polish crime kingpin Marcel, who threatens to kill them unless they pay £2 million. Sam recruits Frankie, a fellow student who also works for a credit-card company, and they target big spenders in Miami. Their plan goes awry when an increasingly disaffected Yatesy uses one of the stolen cards, so instead they lure a top Miami jeweller to London, where Rafa poses as a wealthy sultan. The scam works but Yatesy and Rafa make off with the jewels, only for Sam to send Marcel to the drop-off where Yatesy hopes to sell to a major drug dealer. Yatesy escapes the subsequent gun battle but dies in a crash involving Sam's car, while Fordy retrieves the jewels. Two years later, after Sam's release from jail, businesswoman Frankie receives a mysterious delivery of gems.

Return to Homs

Egypt/Germany/Sweden/Japan/Switzerland/Canada/Lebanon/The Netherlands/Denmark/Norway 2013
Director: Talal Derki

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

As we all know by now, the peaceful protests against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad soon degenerated into an ongoing armed conflict, largely due to the vicious attacks of the regime. Hundreds of thousands of people have died, dividing the country irremediably and radicalising many a peaceful citizen.

This journey towards radicalisation forms the core of Syrian journalist and filmmaker Talal Derki's visceral documentary *Return to Homs*, winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. Filming over the course of three bloody years, from 2011 to 2013, Derki leads the viewer right into the midst of the maelstrom, giving an unprecedented insider's view of the conflict as he exhaustively follows Basset and Ossama, two close friends from the city of Homs – the so-called capital of the revolution.

Nineteen-year-old Basset is a blacksmith with a promising career as the goalkeeper of his national team. Twenty-four-year-old Ossama, a pacifist and media activist, films Basset and other demonstrators as they take to the streets to protest against Assad's regime. Their intentions are at first peaceful: Basset somehow becomes the voice of the revolution, as he invents anti-regime chants to air in public or to the camera, and speaks about his dreams and disappointment with the political reality.

As government attacks intensify, the bombardment of their city by Assad's forces soon radicalises the protesters, turning them into unwitting insurgent rebels. Eventually, arms are sought to enable them to fight back and free those trapped in the siege; many of these (predominantly) young men end up badly wounded or killed, becoming in the process martyrs of the revolution.

Key to the film's impact is the way it captures the birth of a hero. Unlike Jehane Noujaim's *The Square* (2013), about the Egyptian uprising, in which a group of revolutionaries shared the main role, *Return to Homs* in essence has only one protagonist, since Basset's immense charisma and unrelenting courage completely dominate the film. With no perspectives on the conflict other than the filmmaker's and his protagonist's (and the latter's faithful followers), it is precisely through Basset's politicisation that thorny questions about violence, fanaticism and the uncertain nature of the freedom he's fighting for arise – questions that assume a darker undertow as his obsession with martyrdom grows.

If all this sounds less like a documentary and more like an action blockbuster, there is certainly enough material for the latter – a quality of the film that has been noted by numerous critics and viewers alike. Which isn't to discredit *Return to Homs*; on the contrary, Derki's tight, fast-paced editing is one of its many virtues, foregrounding the power, immediacy and gripping nature of his material. Moreover, its fiction-like quality raises questions about the faux-objective nature of many a documentary, or indeed the barrage of images on news programmes.

In fact, the most outstanding sequence in *Return to Homs* transforms the handheld immediacy into something profoundly metaphorical. When a desperate woman declares

Seven Streets, Two Markets and a Wedding Glimpses of Lost London 1930-1980

United Kingdom 2014, Certificate U 66m 0s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

This anthology of films set in or about London begins rather mysteriously. *Taken from East Lane Bridge* (1932) is set in somewhere in the city but where exactly? A winding lane, cows grazing, in the distance some fields: this is a landscape at least as rural as it is urban. There are cars too, quite a lot of them, far more than one might imagine would be clogging roads in the early 1930s. Mostly there are people, dressed as if for work or for a show, heading – on foot and on bicycle – towards the camera. Who are they? The soundtrack features ticking: is time running out? Are they escaping a disaster zone?

Archival and found-footage films, of which there are a growing number as directors feast on the forgotten, privately hoarded or suppressed material recirculating in this age of YouTube and retromania, are often at their most effective when they resist the urge to use old images pedagogically or as argument clinchers. When the past doesn't look or feel like the past, when the lines segregating past from present are muddled, when the images themselves invite doubt and deconstruction: that's when history – as force-field, fraught no man's land, zone of complexities – most comes alive.

Seven Streets, Two Markets and a Wedding doesn't for the most part concern itself with championing ambiguity or even meditating on what an archive is or could be. Drawn from London's Screen Archives heritage collections, it's being released at a time when there's a growing vogue for websites (such as Spitalfields Life), publishers (Café Royal) and films (the BFI-issued *Wonderful London*) that are interested in the visual anthropology of bygone municipal life, that hanker for a time when urban streetscapes weren't populated by individuals wedded to their Bluetooths, playing Angry Birds or snapping pictures of brand stencils. All are animated by a dream of a city inhabited without interfaces, without digital prostheses.

Most arresting here is an extract from *All on a Winter's Day* (1952), in which semi-professional filmmaker Alderman A.E. Reneson Couché wanders around Marylebone documenting its



City flickers: *Seven Streets*

brickwork, private clubs, outdoor stairwells. There are few people to be seen. Some appear apparitional, almost dissolving into the walls across which they move. Has there been a grand exodus? Or is this an eerie premonition of an imminent depeopling? Time is out of joint here. A strange melancholy permeates this dreamworld.

Also odd – though in the sense of tonally inept – is the Wembley Road Safety Council-sponsored *These Can Be Yours* (1949), which juxtaposes badly staged accidents ("Look out, you fool!" cries the narrator) with domestic scenes of men dropping trays of food, and ends with a baffling sequence in which the narrator asks, "Will next year see you lying like this?" Cue a shot of a tight-sweatered young woman lounging on a lawn. "Or this?" Cue a woman in a bikini on the same lawn. "Or this?" Cue a shot of a grave.

The films are not without charm – a 1944 wedding in Kingsbury, Brent, features friends of the married couple piling on top of each other; Cecil Musk's *Green Islands* (1954), both a praise song to and a manifesto for verdant London, has the jaunty colours of a Ladybird book and the stirring modern rhetoric of a Festival of Britain exhibition guide – but though they're prefaced by brief shots of what their locations look like in the present day, *Seven Streets* doesn't really offer any kind of argument. Paul Kelly and Saint Etienne's recent *How We Used to Live* (2013) and Emma Louise Williams's *Under the Cranes* (2011), are both more rhythm-analytically rich.

Seven Streets proceeds broadly chronologically but it would have gained by having a clearer topographic structure in the spirit of Chris Petit's anti-clockwise road journey around the capital in *London Orbital* (2002) or Andrew Kotting's pedalo-travelogue to near the site of the Olympics in *Swandown* (2012). Its subtitle ('Glimpses of Lost London') also begs some crucial questions: what London has been lost and why does it matter? ☹

3 Days to Kill

USA/France 2013

Director: McG

Certificate 12A 117m 10s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Having launched Liam Neeson's second career in action thrillers with *Taken* (2008), Luc Besson now attempts to repeat this success with Kevin Costner in *3 Days to Kill*. Beginning with an absurdly high-stakes premise – 32-year CIA veteran Ethan Renner (Costner) thinks he has a cold but it's actually terminal lung cancer – Besson's story has clunky pacing and places far too much emphasis on Renner's attempts to repair his relationship with his family rather than relying on action sequences driven by, as *Taken* has it, "a very particular set of skills". Ethan's perpetually enraged teenage daughter Zoöy (Hailee Steinfeld) hurls insults and trite accusations of abandonment at him at every opportunity, but these fall like dinner-theatre punches – very weak and far from their mark. (Her surliness is contrasted with Ethan's home-video memories of her at the seaside as a tot, which conveniently seem to also have been shot in widescreen.)

The other young harpy in Ethan's life is Vivi (Amber Heard), an elite CIA assassin who offers him an experimental cancer drug in exchange for his help tracking down international arms dealer 'the Wolf' (Richard Sammel) and his lieutenant 'the Albino' (Tómas Lemarquis). These missions are complicated by Ethan's commitments to his wife and daughter (he gets caught up with brutalising a Middle Eastern limo driver and is late picking Zoöy up from school) and by the drug, which gives him horrible hallucinations whenever his heart rate is elevated. (Naturally, the latter is conveniently deployed when Ethan gets a little too close to the terrorists.) The guiding tension between Ethan and Vivi (she doesn't care about body count, he does) is overstated even for an action film, and doesn't really bear out logically – she racks up perhaps one tenth of his kills. Heard is woefully miscast – her attempts at sexy braggadocio are stiff, and she fails to establish any chemistry with Costner. As she stands over him after the film's final shootout, Ethan looks up her skirt and murmurs, "Am I in hell?" Her raspy retort ("Is that what it looks like to you?") comes off as the laughable opposite of coyness. ➡

However, the film's awkward, indecisive



The Luc of the draw: Kevin Costner

Credits and Synopsis

Curator
Deborah Salter
Contemporary
Photography
Denzil Armour-Brown
Film Editor
Miikka Leskinen

Production
Companies
Film Hub London
and London's

Screen Archives
in association
with Film London
and the BFI Film
Audience Network
present a Made in
London production
Presented by Film
Hub London, led by
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Audience Network

Curated by London's
Screen Archives

In Colour and
Black and White
[1.33:1]

Distributor
Independent
Cinema Office

An anthology of films (some included in their entirety, others excerpted) set in or about London between 1932 and 1979. The films are 'Taken from East Lane Bridge' (1932), 'These Can Be Yours' (1949), 'Wedding of Frances Burgess and Charles Holmes at St Andrew's Church, Kingsbury' (1944), 'All on a Winter's Day' (1952), 'Green Islands' (1954), 'Various Views: Hackney Housing' (c. 1950), 'Lambeth Walks' (1960s), 'Walworth Road' (1960), 'S.E. 18: Impressions of a London Suburb' (1964) and 'Tower Hamlets Carnival' (1979).



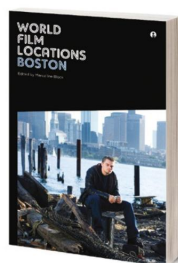
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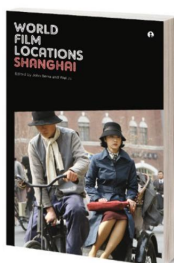
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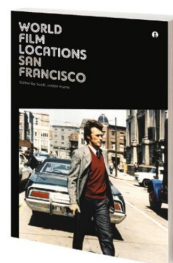
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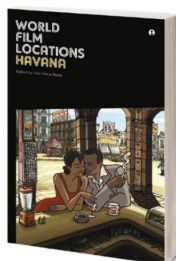
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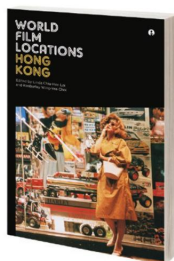
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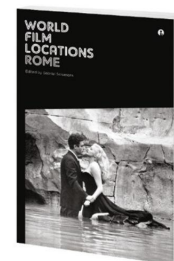
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World Film Locations: Hong Kong

Edited by Linda Chiu-Han Lai and Kimburley Wing-Yee Choi
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Published July 2013

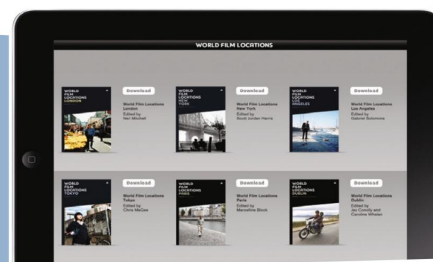


World Film Locations: Rome

Edited by Gabriel Solomons
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Published May 2014

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tone is largely attributable to director McG, whose flat action sequences will surely rank among the least cinematic of the year. Rarely using crosscutting, camera movement or a change in framing, the fights and chases merely pass by instead of conjuring tension; in short, the film embodies the worst of television aesthetics. While many contemporary filmmakers suffer from an inability to hold a shot long enough, the slowed rhythms here do little to elevate the clichéd 'thrills', such as Vivi speeding around Paris in a black Peugeot. And Ethan's hallucinations, rendered with a fisheye lens and digitally manufactured twitchiness, feel like late-90s holdovers.

With its bloated 117-minute run time, *3 Days to Kill* exemplifies the phrase "a mile long and an inch deep". Save your excitement for the next Neeson film. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ryan Kavanaugh
Marc Libert
Screenplay
Adi Hasak
Luc Besson
Based on a story
by Luc Besson
**Director of
Photography**
Thierry Arbogast
Edited by
Audrey Simonaud
**Production
Designer**
Sébastien Inizan
Original Music
Composed by
Guillaume Roussel
Sound
Stéphane Bucher
Frederic Dubois
Didier Lozahic
Costume Designer
Olivier Bériot

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**Production
Companies**
Relativity Media
and EuropaCorp
present a 3DTK, Inc.

and Relativity Media
co-production
A Wonderland
Sound and Vision
production
A McG film
Executive Producer
Tucker Tooley

CAST

Kevin Costner
Ethan Renner
Amber Heard
Vivi Delay
Hailee Steinfeld
Zoey Renner
Connie Nielsen
Christine Renner
Tómas Lemarquis
the Albino
Richard Sammel
the Wolf
Marc Andreoni
Mitat Yilmaz
Bruno Ricci
Guido
Jonas Bloquet
Hugh
Eriq Ebouaney
Jules
Joachim Sigue
Abbate

Allison Valance
Sumia

**Dolby Digital/
SDDS/Datasat**
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
EI Films

Paris, present day. Elite CIA assassin Vivi Delay is tasked with hunting down an international arms dealer known as 'the Wolf'. She begins by observing a sting operation on 'the Albino', his right-hand man, which is helmed by veteran agent Ethan Renner. Renner is distracted by what he thinks is a bad cough, and by the fact that it's his daughter Zoey's birthday, and the mission goes awry; his fellow agents die and the Albino escapes.

Ethan wakes in hospital and is informed that he has a type of brain cancer that has spread to his lungs. Given only months to live, he tries to make amends with his estranged wife Christine and daughter Zoey. Neither of them wants much to do with him, but Christine softens after hearing that he's sick and has officially retired from the CIA. His retirement is short-lived, however, as Vivi offers him an experimental treatment in exchange for helping her locate the Wolf. Ethan agrees but struggles to deal with the drug's hallucinogenic effects (brought on by increased heart rate). He disposes of the Albino in the Metro and finally brings the Wolf into custody after a shootout at a party held by Zoey's boyfriend's father.

Several months later, Ethan's family celebrate Christmas together at the French seaside.

Touchy Feely

USA 2013
Director: Lynn Shelton
Certificate 15 87m 58s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

With her last two films, *Humpday* (2009) and *Your Sister's Sister* (2011), Lynn Shelton moved deftly away from her mumblecore roots to craft romcoms that felt fresh, intimate and credible while still drawing on the flexibility of improvisation. Her goal, she's said, "is to create characters that are resonant because they're recognisable as real human beings". *Touchy Feely*, her first fully scripted film, marks a bid to incorporate a further element, a hint of Woody Allenish magical realism, but although Shelton's skill with actors and instinct for relationships are still in evidence, the added ingredient feels like a misstep. Like her previous films, *Touchy Feely* starts out in appealingly character-driven mode, but then it abruptly turns plot-driven, dragging in contrived situations that divert and distort the flow of the movie.

It's not all loss. As ever, Shelton shows warm affection for her characters, even while poking gentle fun at these new-agey Seattle bohos, all Reiki and tofu and tantric healing and hand-crafted olive oils. Her cast serve her well, especially Rosemarie DeWitt (the seductively scheming lesbian in *Your Sister's Sister*) as Abby, the masseuse who abruptly finds herself repelled by the touch of skin, and Allison Janney as Bronwyn, her nurturing mentor. Scoot McNairy is Abby's boyfriend Jesse, sweetly bemused to find himself suddenly rejected by his previously horny girlfriend while her teenage niece (Ellen Page, slightly wasted in a repressed role) starts coming on to him. There are moments of diverting physical comedy bordering on slapstick, as when Abby's repressed dentist brother Paul (Josh Pais) explores various increasingly awkward ways to climb on to a massage table. (The comedy of embarrassment has always been Shelton's speciality.)

But it's the plot's central conceit that jams the gears. In effect, Abby and Paul swap characters: she's suddenly afflicted with a phobia about touching, while her misanthropic brother, whose



Hands off: Rosemarie DeWitt

dental practice was dying on him, discovers that he has miraculously healing hands. This feels forced and unconvincing: even if Abby's problem can be read as a heavyhanded metaphor for fear of commitment – Jesse wants her to move in with him – there seems no particular reason why her tactile skills should be transferred to Paul. Having got herself into this double bind, Shelton then crudely shoots her way out by having both siblings take ecstasy – even if Abby's reactions seem more reminiscent of LSD than of MDMA – and enjoy sex: Abby with an ex-boyfriend and Paul with Bronwyn.

In the midst of all this a potentially fertile plotline – Jenny's yearning for independence from her over-controlling dad, countered by her sense of loyalty to him – gets squeezed out and never fully resolved. Shelton doesn't rush her films, otherwise one might suspect that *Touchy Feely* had gone into production before having been fully thought through. As it is, one gets the impression that while her feeling for her characters is still intact, she's temporarily lost her touch. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Steven Schardt
Written by
Lynn Shelton
**Director of
Photography**
Benjamin Kasulke
Editor
Lynn Shelton

Production Design
John Lavin
Original Score
Vinnny Smith
**Production
Sound Mixers**
Vinnny Smith
Kelsey Wood
Costume Design
Carrie Stacey

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**Production
Company**
A Most Favored
Nations production
Executive Producers
Nancy Black
Dashiell Gantner
Vallejo Gantner

Trey Beck
Dave Nakayama

CAST

Rosemarie DeWitt
Abby
Allison Janney
Bronwyn

Ron Livingston
Adrian
Scoot McNairy
Jesse
Ellen Page
Jenny
Josh Pais
Paul
Tomo Nakayama
Henry

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
House Distribution UK

Present-day Seattle. Abby, who works as a tantric masseuse, is having a passionate affair with Jesse, who runs a bike shop, and is considering moving in with him. Her depressive older brother Paul is a dentist whose practice is dwindling as his patients die off; his daughter Jenny works as his dental nurse. Abby asks her mentor Bronwyn, who practises Reiki, for advice about Paul. Bronwyn gives her a tonic for him, which Abby passes on that evening when she and Jesse have dinner at Paul's house.

Abby suddenly finds that the touch of skin repels her. She isn't even able to kiss Jesse. Paul, treating Henry, a musician friend of Jenny's who suffers from chronic jaw pain, finds that he has healing powers in his hands. Word spreads and his waiting room is packed. Abby cancels her

clients and consults Bronwyn, who gives her two ecstasy tablets. Abby invites Jesse to take them with her but he demurs. Paul starts training with Bronwyn to become a Reiki master.

One of Paul's patients returns, yelling that his pain has come back and calling Paul a cheat. Paul's patients fall away. Jenny runs off weeping; she encounters Jesse and invites him to Henry's concert. Abby takes an ecstasy tablet and wanders the streets; she meets Adrian, her ex, and they have sex at his late grandmother's house. Paul, looking for Jenny, takes the other tablet; he visits a disco and spends the night with Bronwyn. Jenny asks Jesse to kiss her but he refuses, hugging her instead. Abby reunites with Jesse. They have dinner at Paul's house and Henry arrives with flowers for Jenny.

When I Saw You

Jordan/Israel [Palestine]/Greece/United Arab Emirates/
United Kingdom/Switzerland/Lebanon/USA/Spain 2012
Director: Annemarie Jacir, Certificate 12A 97m 43s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Palestinian writer-director Annemarie Jacir's first feature, *Salt of This Sea* (2008), about a Brooklyn-born Palestinian returning to her ancestral land, was impassioned but widely criticised for coming across as shrill and didactic. Her follow-up feature takes a gentler, less confrontational approach – in some ways, perhaps, a little too gentle. Films that adopt a child's-eye view can be intense and moving – *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *Les jeux interdits* (1952) furnish obvious examples – but there's always a danger of cosiness setting in. It's a danger that *When I Saw You* doesn't wholly avoid.

The subject matter is harrowing enough: a young Palestinian boy, intelligent and sensitive, exiled from his home after the Six Day War for reasons he doesn't understand and desperate to return – not least because his beloved father is still missing. With his expressive features and dark-eyed stare, Mahmoud Asfa is excellent casting as the boy, Tarek, and he's well supported by Ruba Blal as his mother, trying to shield her son from her own despair, and Saleh Bakri (who also starred in *Salt of This Sea*) as the fedayeen fighter who befriends both of them. In contrast to the earlier film, where officious and obstructive Jewish-Israelis showed up to hamper the heroine at every turn, this time the Israelis never appear and are scarcely even mentioned, though we're constantly aware of their presence just over the horizon.

The opening scenes in a Jordanian refugee camp convey, without undue emphasis, a pervasive sense of aimlessness and casual squalor; we see Tarek join a long queue for the camp's only – and repellently filthy – male toilet. And setting out on his trek to his lost home, the boy encounters four young Jordanians whose car has broken down; the driver treats him contemptuously as a "camp boy", by definition to be distrusted. It's once he arrives at the fedayeen camp, where young men and women are training to recapture their lost homeland by force, that the tone of the film



Count me in: Mahmoud Asfa, Saleh Bakri

shifts into something more comfortable. For all the fedayeen's seriousness of purpose, the atmosphere here is more like a holiday camp, with card games, dancing, and young Tarek adopted as a mascot and taught to play the oud.

There are moments of poignancy, as when one of the fedayeen sings a song about a garden, her voice almost breaking with melancholy, and it's clear that the garden represents the lost homeland; and later on another of the group, returning from a sortie, announces "We saw the lights of Jerusalem!" as though speaking of paradise. But promising threads, such as Tarek's idiot-savant genius for numbers, though amply signalled, in the end lead nowhere, and despite a scene where everyone hides in a cave while 'copters circle overhead, and the film's cliffhanger open ending, there's surprisingly little sense of danger. Perhaps, having as it were bracketed the target with her first two features, Jacir needs to aim somewhere near dead centre the next time. 6

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ossama Bawardi
Written by
Annemarie Jacir
Director of Photography
Hélène Louvart
Editors
Annemarie Jacir
Panos Voutsaras
Production Designer
Hussein Baydoun
Original Music
Kamran Rastegar
Sound
Raja Dubayah
Kostas Varibopiotis
Costume Design
Hamada Atallah

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Production Companies
Philistine Films presents an Asfari Foundation, Faliro House Productions, Tariq Al Ghusseini co-production With the support

of Khalid Shoman Foundation With the participation of SANAD Supported by Visions Sud Est and Graal Post Production House A film by Annemarie Jacir A Philistine Films, Lamma Shoftak, Faliro House Productions, Tariq Al Ghusseini, Cactus Films production With the participation of SANAD, Graal Post Production House, Visions Sud Est, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Tribeca All Access, Global Film Initiative, Art, Kodak Cine Labs Greece With the collaboration of Louverture Films, Pontas
Executive Producers
Annemarie Jacir
Christos V.
Konstantakopoulos

CAST

Mahmoud Asfa
Tarek
Ruba Blal
Ghaydaa
Saleh Bakri
Layth
Ali Elayan
Abu Akram
Firas Taybeh
Majed
Ruba Shamshoum
Zain
Ahmad Srour
Toussaint
Suha Najjar
Madame Nura

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Jordanian theatrical title
Lamma shoftak

Jordan, 1967. Eleven-year-old Tarek and his mother Ghaydaa are living in the Harir refugee camp, built to house Palestinians driven out of Israel after the Six Day War. They eagerly scan each truckload of new arrivals in the hope that Tarek's missing father will be among them. Illiterate but exceptionally gifted with numbers, Tarek gets bored at school and is excluded for being disruptive. He berates his mother, saying that she smothers him and that he wants to go home. A fedayeen freedom fighter, Layth, visits the camp and takes two young men away with him. Without telling Ghaydaa, Tarek sets out to find his home and his father.

In the desert, Tarek is found by Layth, who takes him to the fedayeen camp. Tarek soon fits in, impressing Abu Akram, the camp's leader, with his skill with numbers and participating in the training. Ghaydaa comes to find her son and tries to drag him away but he resists; rather than leave him, she too settles in the camp. An attraction grows between Ghaydaa and Layth. It's announced on the radio that the Israelis have bombed Harir. The fedayeen prepare to cross into Israel. Told that he can't join them, Tarek runs away, again heading 'home'. He arrives at a fence patrolled by a jeep. Ghaydaa and Layth, who have followed, call to him to come back, but when the jeep has passed he makes a run for it. Ghaydaa runs after him, takes his hand and together they head for the fence.

X-Men Days of Future Past

USA/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Bryan Singer
Certificate 12A 131m 26s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The crux of the unwieldy plot of *X-Men: Days of Future Past* – mutant shapeshifter Mystique decides whether or not to assassinate anti-mutant mad scientist Bolivar Trask – is a moment that serves as the hinge for at least two timelines. In the frame story, the last remaining cast members from Bryan Singer's first *X-Men* films are hunted down and killed by Sentinels – impressive shapeshifting robots – in an eternal nightscape. Old friends/arch-enemies Xavier and Magneto send series stalwart Wolverine back in time to cancel out 50 years of history. There's an obvious parallel with *The Terminator* (1984), but Chris Claremont and John Byrne's 'Days of Future Past' Marvel Comics storyline was published in 1981 – so any influence runs from the X-franchise to James Cameron.

Claremont and Byrne's story has been amazingly influential in comics. Many attempts have been made to elaborate on a premise they economically got through in two slim issues (*The Uncanny X-Men*, issues 141 and 142). A mandatory coda that acts here as a teaser for *X-Men: The Age of Apocalypse*, an already-greenlit follow-up, introduces a villain whose whole purpose was to support a plotline basically rehashing 'Days of Future Past' at tiresome length. It's possible that the real timeline hinge moment this revisits is Singer's decision to abandon *X-Men The Last Stand* (2006) to Brett Ratner, while hopping hero franchises to make *Superman Returns*. Ratner's film severely bungled another key Claremont-Byrne storyline ('The Dark Phoenix Saga') and mishandled or killed several characters who've been off limits for the series ever since. It did, however, introduce Ellen Page as Kitty Pryde, a major comics character still sidelined in movies. Persuading Mystique to drop the gun not only saves the future from Sentinels but also erases *The Last Stand* – and, seemingly, most of the two Wolverine solo films – from continuity.

With a returning Singer taking over from Matthew Vaughn, who handled *X-Men: First Class* after walking off *The Last Stand*, and a premise that allows James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender to coexist with Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen as Xavier and Magneto young and old, this is pretty much a greatest-hits package. The show-off set pieces are often astonishing: speedster Quicksilver (Evan Peters) has a bullet-time sequence scored by Jim Croce's 'Time in a Bottle' which ranks with the Nightcrawler White House attack and Magneto's jailbreak from *X-Men 2* (2003) as an outstanding cinematic depiction of a superpower; and Magneto's repurposing of the 1973 giant robot Sentinels (adapted from a great Jack Kirby design) puts Michael Bay's *Transformers* to shame. It's a pity so much of the expository talk is clunky, many of the plot turns so random, and that the logjam of characters means so many fine actors cast in iconic roles barely get a look-in.

Jackman's formerly wiseass Wolverine is forced to play straight man to McAvoy's here-disillusioned Xavier, while Jennifer Lawrence impresses as Mystique in a blue skinsuit and some 70s outfits. However, so much is going on that the leads and their intricate relationships get lost. Following the 1960s setting of *First Class*, there are some relishable

1970s kicks here: the bouffant hairdo of Peter Dinklage, playing Trask; Wolverine fascinated by a lava-lamp and uncomfortable on a waterbed; and a quickly redacted moment when Richard Nixon seems to be selflessly heroic. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lauren Shuler Donner
Bryan Singer
Simon Kinberg
Hutch Parker
Screenplay
Simon Kinberg
Story
Jane Goldman
Simon Kinberg
Matthew Vaughn
Director of Photography
Newton Thomas Sigel
Film Editor
John Ottman
Production Designer
John Myhre
Music
John Ottman
Sound Designer
Craig Berkey
Costume Designer
Louise Mingenbach
Visual Effects
MPC
Cinesite
Rising Sun Pictures
Mokko Studio
[Hy*drau]ix
Method Studios
Animal Logic VFX
Special Visual Effects/Character Animation
Digital Domain
Visual Effects/Animation
Rhythm & Hues
Stunt Coordinators
Jeff Habberstad
James M. Churchman
Mike Scherer
Nick Brandon
Trevor Habberstad
John D. Ross
Colin Follenweider
Mark Chadwick
Stefan Lofgren
Paul Leonard

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Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents in association with Marvel Entertainment and TSG Entertainment a Bad Hat Harry, Donners' Company, Simon Kinberg production
A Bryan Singer film
Made in association with Ingenious Media
Produced in association with Down Productions
With the participation of the Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Stan Lee
Todd Halliwell
Josh McLaglen

CAST

Hugh Jackman
Logan, 'Wolverine'
James McAvoy
Charles Xavier
Michael Fassbender
Erik Lehnsherr
Jennifer Lawrence
Raven Darkholme,

'Mystique'
Halle Berry
Ororo Munroe, 'Storm'
Nicholas Hoult
Hank McCoy, 'Beast'
Anna Paquin
Rogue
Ellen Page
Kitty Pryde
Peter Dinklage
Dr Bolivar Trask
Shawn Ashmore
Bobby Drake, 'Iceman'
Omar Sy
Bishop
Evan Peters
Peter Maximoff, 'Quicksilver'
Josh Helman
Major Bill Stryker
Daniel Cudmore
Colossus
Fan Bingbing
Clarice Ferguson, 'Blink'
Adan Cato
Roberto da Costa, 'Sunspot'
Booboo Stewart
James Proudstar, 'Warpath'
Ian McKellen
Magneto
Patrick Stewart
Professor X
Famke Janssen
Jean Grey, 'Phoenix'
Mark Camacho
President Nixon

Dolby Atmos/ Datasat Colour/Prints by
Fotokern
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

In the future, Sentinels – robots developed to combat the mutant threat – have exceeded their brief and subjugated humanity. Professor Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr (aka Magneto) send the consciousness of Logan (aka Wolverine) back to 1973 to possess his younger self in order to avert the murder of Sentinel creator Bolivar Trask by mutant Raven Darkholme (aka Mystique) – the incident that will set off the chain of events leading to this grim outcome. Logan teams up with the younger Xavier and Magneto to talk Mystique – who plans to kill Trask at the Paris peace conference that ends America's involvement in the Vietnam War – out of murder. Trask is saved but the future Sentinels still overwhelm the last X-Men. Learning that Mystique's shapeshifting DNA is the ingredient that makes Sentinels so lethal, Magneto tries to kill her. President Nixon agrees to the activation of Trask's prototype Sentinels, which Magneto remote-controls to run amok in Washington. Mystique, prompted by Xavier, saves Nixon's life and refuses to kill Trask. Logan wakes in an altered, Sentinel-free future, where Jean Grey (aka Phoenix) – whom he was forced to kill in the former timeline – is still alive.

The Young and Prodigious T.S. Spivet

Director: Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Adapted from Reif Larsen's 2009 bestseller, *The Young and Prodigious T.S. Spivet* tells the story of its eponymous hero, a ten-year-old inventor who devises a perpetual-motion machine and then sets out alone across country to Washington DC to pick up a prize for it. He leaves behind his oddball family, and the underlying question is whether he is escaping them, or they have rejected him, following the tragic death of his twin brother in a shooting accident. The potential for dramatic light and shade is obvious and yet the result is an exercise in the safely saccharine, as if director Jean-Pierre Jeunet had looked at the millefeuille whimsy of his 2001 hit *Amélie* and decided that it would need to be toned down if children were involved.

Jeunet's fixation on a particular note of quirky winsomeness means that at times the film drifts oddly out of sync with its own plot. The death of T.S.'s twin brother Layton is skimmed over amid a welter of meet-cute scenes setting up the eccentric Spivet clan's characters. T.S.'s cross-country trip then turns out to be less of an adventure than a chance for Jeunet to present a gallery of classic American 'types', as T.S. encounters a wise old hobo and a garrulous war-vet trucker while dodging an overweight cop. Yet these set pieces are unconvincing, and rather than gaining the clarity of vision a non-American could bring, they seem to lose something in translation through Jeunet's sensibility.

The cosiness of Jeunet's world means that T.S.'s situation, as a ten-year-old alone in an adult world, never carries even a *Home Alone*-style hint of danger or threat, but instead sees him delivered as neatly as a gift-wrapped package to Washington DC. A degree of Macaulay Culkin's knowing mischievousness would have helped with the character of T.S., who is played capably by Kyle Catlett but seems bland and wide-eyed for a continent-crossing prodigy. The film's last act fails to resolve the various imbalances,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Frédéric Brillon
Gilles Legrand
Jean-Pierre Jeunet
Suzanne Girard
Screenplay/ Adaptation
Jean-Pierre Jeunet
Guillaume Laurant
Based on the novel
The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet by
Reif Larsen
Director of Photography
Thomas Hardmeier
Editing by
Hervé Schneid
Production Designer
Aline Bonetto
Original Music
Denis Sanaocore
Sound
Jean Umansky
Gérard Hardy
Sélim Azzazi
Vincent Arnardi
Costume Designer
Madeline Fontaine

Production Companies
Gaumont presents an Épiphète Films, Tapioca Films, Filmarto production in co-production with Gaumont, France 2 Cinéma
With the participation of OCS, France Télévisions, Telefilm Canada and CNC
Executive Producers
Brian Oliver
Sidonie Dumas
Francis Boespflug
Timmy Thompson
Tyler Thompson

CAST

Helena Bonham Carter
Dr Clair
Judy Davis
Ms G.H. Jibsen
Callum Keith Rennie
Tecumseh
Elijah Spivet
Kyle Catlett

Tecumseh Sparrow
'T.S.' Spivet
Niamh Wilson
Gracie Spivet
Jakob Davies
Layton Spivet
Rick Mercer
Roy
Dominique Pinon
Two Clouds
Julian Richings
Ricky
Richard Jutras
Mr Stenpock

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
El Films

French theatrical title
L'Extravagant Voyage du jeune et prodigieux T.S. Spivet



The wizard of odds: Kyle Catlett

as Jeunet wheels out two cartoon baddies – a tacky talk-show host and a fame-hungry PR officer. The element of media satire feels bolted on, and in the case of the talk-show host, seems like a strangely dated throwback to mid-90s teeth-gnashing over Jerry Springer et al.

Adding to the sense of aimlessness is the use of 3D, which brings little to the film – except in the landscape shots of the Spivets' Montana ranch, which are gorgeously rich and crisp. As in *Amélie* and also 2009's *Micmacs*, Jeunet tweaks picture colour and overlays shots with busy, playful animations, but this is the only level of *T.S. Spivet* that seems to fizz with any ideas. Unfortunately, beyond that surface layer, Jeunet's sureness of touch disappears. **S**

Montana, the present. Ten-year-old T.S. Spivet lives on a ranch with his eccentric family. His father believes himself to be a cowboy, born out of time; his mother obsessively catalogues beetles; his sister dreams of winning TV beauty pageants. His twin brother Layton is obsessed with firing guns, and this leads to his death in an accident in the family barn, witnessed by T.S.

An enthusiastic cartographer and inventor, T.S. submits his design for a perpetual-motion machine to the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian responds by telling T.S. that he has been awarded the prestigious Baird Prize. Ignored by his family, T.S. decides to travel to Washington to accept the award. He jumps trains, evades railroad security and police and finally hitches a lift with a trucker. Smithsonian employee G.H. Jibsen is at first shocked by T.S.'s tender age, then delighted as she realises the PR value of a boy wonder. T.S. begins a hectic round of publicity, which alerts his worried parents to his whereabouts. T.S. and his mother are reunited on a TV talk show. T.S. confesses that Layton died while helping him with an experiment to measure a bullet's speed. T.S.'s mother reassures him that she does not blame him for the accident. They walk off the set, pursued by the intrusive host and Jibsen. T.S.'s father arrives and punches the host. The reconciled family return to Montana.

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Off the rails: Marie-France Pisier and Jean-Louis Trintignant in *Trans-Europ Express*

NOUVEAU RICHE

The films of Alain Robbe-Grillet, standard-bearer of the *nouveau roman*, are dark, subversive – and a lot more fun than you might think

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET: SIX FILMS 1963-1974

**THE IMMORTAL ONE/TRANS-EUROP-EXPRESS/
THE MAN WHO LIES/EDEN AND AFTER/N. ROLLS
THE DICE/SUCCESSIVE SLIDINGS OF PLEASURE**

France 1963/67/68/70/71/74; BFI/Region B
Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 576 minutes total;
Features: video introductions by Catherine Robbe-Grillet,
filmed interviews with Alain Robbe-Grillet by Frédéric
Taddei, audio commentaries by Tim Lucas, illustrated
booklet with extended essay by David Taylor

Reviewed by Ian Penman

Alain Robbe-Grillet is not much spoken of these days. He may be one of those artists so closely associated with a certain historical moment that the reality of his work is lost beneath a cloud of half-truths and critical fudging. Serious people who once hymned his work as the only show in town now blush, the books (*Les Gommages*, *La Jalousie*) regarded

as the literary equivalent of crushed-velvet loon pants and hula-hoop contests.

He is remembered, by those who do remember, as an uncompromising cheerleader for the so-called *nouveau roman* of the 1950s. Although French, and a bit of a wolfish libertine, he had the aura of a strict headmaster, laying down the law: what will and will not get you the required grades. He wanted a literature that was anti-naturalism, anti-psychology, anti-as-if-you-were-there. He may well hold the record for the largest number of first chapters started by eager students, put back down and never finished. Even Robbe-Grillet himself said that his novels lagged behind the more sophisticated model he proposed in his rapt theorising. He originally trained as an agronomist, and you wonder if his eye remained that of a scientist, more concerned with plots in the quantitative, surveyor's sense rather than the literary kind.

In 1961 he made his move into cinema with the script for Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad*. The latter, as we are legally required to say today, is a deeply 'iconic' film. So iconic, you may be unsure whether you actually saw it or just have the feeling that you did. If you are of a certain age, it may be immaterial. It was

a marker of its time, a byword for something or other. (Something severe, mystifying and possibly a bit kinky.) Which, you'd have to say, is ironic, regarding a film that spoofed the basic unreliability of memory. From later interviews, you get the feeling that Robbe-Grillet himself maybe didn't have the highest opinion of *Marienbad*. I suspect that what is missing there, and what is on display in his own films, is a certain skirling unpredictability.

There are tastefully posed tableaux in Robbe-Grillet too, but always part of a larger mosaic, with bolder, crazier, even sillier elements to throw them into relief. *Marienbad* settled all too comfortably into its role as A Serious Canonical Work – whereas one of the delights of Robbe-Grillet's best films is that they are not what you might expect at all. They're far funnier, for a start. His is a wry, scattershot, sometimes deeply subversive humour – almost like a darker, more languorous Jacques Tati. Which is not such a far-fetched comparison as it might at first seem. The lead characters in Robbe-Grillet's films (usually played by the director's go-to alter ego, Jean-Louis Trintignant) have a baffled, blustering way about them that isn't far from Monsieur Hulot: gauche, oblivious, skirting disaster. There's an

exhilarating sense of play, of someone discovering all the things that cinema can do. The films strike me as far more multi-hued than his texts.

Film-wise, we might then have expected something from Robbe-Grillet that was floridly 'literary', a scrapbook of obvious borrowings from other cinematic masters, the signatures on the permission slips still showing. This is not the case at all. If anything, he went at the business of film with far more dash and swerve and elegance than many old repertory hands. This does not feel like the work of a weekend dilettante. Robbe-Grillet knows how to make a point visually, with light and sound and montage. The camera swoops, rustles, floats; there is a gorgeous extended scene in *Trans-Europ-Express* (1967) that has something of the silent rapture of the tailing sequence in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Other scenes recall the Welles of *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) and *F for Fake* (1973): a gaze in absolute overdrive. There are signs Robbe-Grillet may have been influenced by the stop-go rhythms of post-war *musique concrète*.

In *Trans-Europ-Express*, Trintignant plays a nervy, ferret-faced criminal – or, at any rate, he plays someone who longs to be a such a criminal. At one point, he enters a plush train carriage where an impromptu film-production meeting is under way. In the film being discussed, a nervy criminal enters a train carriage where...

The problem with outlining Robbe-Grillet's films in this way is that it makes them sound like a real pain in the *cul*, typical 60s experimental blether, when in fact they are enormous fun – far more Marx Brothers than Marx and Freud. Trintignant's macguffin of a suitcase may contain drugs – or it may just contain a fetishist's coil of rope and a takeaway baguette. The point isn't in any revelation of 'content' but the structural effect it has on all those whose hands it passes through. (I flashed here to John Boorman's *Point Blank*, but also to a Looney Tunes classic called *Ain't That Ducky*, in which Elmer Fudd and Daffy Duck spend the entire reel vying for a mysterious briefcase, though neither seems to know why; when finally opened, it contains... a sign saying "THE END".)

The Immortal One (1963) is a murky love triangle set by, and on, the Bosphorus, and plays like Antonioni hijacked by the Hope/Crosby *Road* films, shot with a scrupulous pervert's eye for the lie of bodies and the look of rooms. Scenes repeat, are shuffled, fragment. The same set-up is considered from several angles. Relationships between people are left unclarified. In the middle of opaque dialogue, a third voice declaims that the whole thing is just another pitiable excuse to indulge the sorry orientalist gaze of western artists.

In *The Man Who Lies* (1968), a mysterious character fetches up in a post-WWII hamlet. (It was filmed in Czechoslovakia, but the implications are all French.) This jabbering stranger – played with utter glee by Trintignant – insinuates himself into the community. He gatecrashes the local bigwig's chateau; he charms a series of more or less pliable women. There are undertones that are reminiscent of Pasolini's *Theorem*, but rather than some

brooding and sexy Christ figure, this guy is oily, disagreeable, a patent fraud. Nothing here is night and fog – it is all out in the daylight.

What fascinates Robbe-Grillet is the world of gesture, fingers and palms, lips and eyebrows, moments when the body asserts something quite different to what the logical voice is saying. In this, as in other fixations, Robbe-Grillet is a near relative of the novelist-philosopher Pierre Klossowski (1905-2001), two of whose works were themselves turned into haunting cinema by Raúl Ruiz. There is the same concentration on a favoured 'type' of woman, nestling among an eternal repetition of precise tableaux, staged betrayals and unlikely delights. (Also, they both have a thing for stockings and suspenders.) The work of both men was partly driven by odd and inscrutable marriages (Klossowski to Denise, Robbe-Grillet to the notorious Catherine, who takes a number of cameo roles in his films). Maurice Blanchot said of Klossowski's work that it was a "mixture of erotic austerity and theological debauchery". A similar feel of topsy-turvy displacement operates in Robbe-Grillet: people are filmed like things, while the dumb surfaces of this world are gently eroticised. In all his films, there are scenes verging on or hinting at sexual violence, only for an unexpected cut or flashback to suggest that all we assumed was the case (who was in charge, who was wielding power, what desiring ends were in sight) may be completely mistaken.

Although these would usually be categorised as 'arthouse' films, they are a long way from the sombre and earnest world of other repertory

There are scenes verging on sexual violence, only for an unexpected cut to suggest that all we assumed may be mistaken



Anicée Alvina in *Successive Slidings of Pleasure*

classics of the time, far nearer the flaky world of cheap crime magazines and cartoon strips. You would never guess it from the extant commentary but there are moments you could only describe as frisky, naughty, farcical. In *Trans-Europ-Express*, partly set in Antwerp, there is a bargain-basement gag about 'twerps'. Someone is given a vital address to memorise. The following exchange then takes place: "Repeat where." "Where." "Good." The spirit of Abbott and Costello lives!

The plots are the slenderest of reeds, banal reruns of old genre conventions, full of jokey inserts, feints, digressions. There are long sequences where characters simply swan about in liminal zones such as docks, train stations or shorelines – places where one thing ends and another begins. Although *Trans-Europ-Express* remains my personal favourite, the prize for best film should probably go to *The Man Who Lies*, a canny, riveting meditation on the genre of WWII French Resistance films. With only a small amount of re-editing it could easily pass muster as a conventional psychological thriller. A lot of the credit must go to Trintignant, who is on screen for virtually every minute of the film. It is a virtuoso performance – an actor acting the part of a man acting the part of someone faking a wilfully unconvincing borrowed identity. It manages to be both a mystery about this dark period in France's history and a veiled commentary on any film that lays claim to a superior and knowing 'realism'.

To my mind, something goes disastrously wrong with the remaining three works here: *Eden and After* (1970), *N. Rolls the Dice* (1971) and *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* (1974). Robbe-Grillet has become so confident in his style that it's as if he feels there's nowhere left to go but inwards, into full-blown wispy abstraction. He no longer has any patience for the least amount of sustained narrative; all that remains are scattered surface effects, a pious and enervated pointillism. What in 1960s films was risk-taking now seems like pointless quirkiness. I've seen grand claims made for *Successive Slidings* – as some sort of subversive feminist text, for example. And it's precisely the sort of lazy doodle that invites reflex sub-Foucault theorising. It's not difficult to make such Deeply Symbolic Statements; the trick is surely to bury such spiky implications in the folds of the work, where they aren't so archly obvious and can still linger on in the mind of the viewer.

These are precisely the sort of films you would expect a middle-aged intellectual French novelist to make. Annoyingly, they remain beautifully shot and expertly composed (by Robbe-Grillet's regular editor Bob Wade). If you could edit out all the silly role-playing games, leaving just the on-the-lam camerawork and lush soundtrack, you would have a sublime kind of ambient cinema. (I could happily watch hours of Robbe-Grillet's camera prowling alleyways and stairwells to the accompaniment of dub-like bursts of sound and echo.) I'm only surprised Robbe-Grillet didn't attempt such a film: no more pesky characters, just a narrative spun out of infinitesimal changes in weather and light and motion, all that is glimpsed at the edge of things. A CCTV cinemascope. The story of an eye. 🕸

New releases

THE BAMBOO SAUCER

Frank Telford; USA 1968; Olive Films/
Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 103 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The explosion of American indie drive-in film production in the 60s was such that there still remain thousands of forgotten movies to be excavated and rediscovered, and this hilariously odd Cold War ditty is a great example, a psychotronic genre item that even 70s sci-fi geeks never heard of.

The half-assed brainchild of Oscar-winning FX pioneer John P. Fulton (his only writing credit, after decades of process work from 1931's *Frankenstein* onwards) and hack pulpster Rip Van Ronkel, and the only feature film directed by busy TV bum Frank Telford, this nearly Ed Woodian sample of topicality begins with a bullheaded hot-shot pilot (hunky dolt John Ericson) claiming that he's seen a UFO and thereafter joining a secret mission to find the downed flying saucer where it's reportedly been seen – in Red China.

Led by Pentagon mission man Dan Duryea, the US contingent quickly collides with a Soviet crew with exactly the same agenda. ("Impossible!" someone cries when he hears about the Russians; the response is, "But one of them said nyet!") The espionage antagonists clash in classically Yankee and Soviet ways but then cooperate to avoid discovery by the Chinese army in the region (the frosty northern territory, with no bamboo in sight), find the saucer (hidden by villagers in a church) and, in a bizarre climactic act that feels more like a Soviet sci-fi film from the same era, fly the mysterious ship to Geneva, where "both of our countries have embassies!"

In a sad example of the kind of fate so common for Golden Age stars in their autumn years, Duryea was left with this as his final film – though the riotous overacting is leavened by Lois Nettleton as a sweet Russian spy who falls for the American lug even as he tries to persuade her to betray her motherland.

Shot in the Sierra Nevada foothills when it's not just in a Santa Monica TV studio, Telford's little programmer is full of enjoyably nonsensical astrophysics and character-actor overcalculation (as the lead Russian, Vincent Beck is almost doing stand-up). If anything, it gains a glow from being a lost movie no one remembered existing at all.

Disc: Nice archival print, no extras.

DRAKE OF ENGLAND

Arthur Woods; UK 1935; Network/Region 2 DVD;
Certificate U; 95 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: image gallery

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Director Arthur Woods's energetic style could feel rudderless in films lacking a strong dramatic anchor (such as 1938's *The Return of Carol Deane*) but it works a treat in *Drake of England*, a cheerfully patriotic history lesson made with enthusiasm and care, charting Francis Drake's 21-year rise from "common sailor" to "England's greatest admiral", acknowledging his piratical roots though not his slave-trading days. Adapted from a play by Louis N. Parker, whose *Disraeli* brought George Arliss an Oscar, it's an engaging yarn of political skulduggery, spies, treasure, circumnavigation, bowls and vividly rendered battles at sea. Woods brings vigour to

the palace pomp, immediacy to the raids and tactical clarity to Drake's David-and-Goliath outmanoeuvring of the Spanish armada.

Matheson Lang makes a genial, burly Drake, with wily, twinkling eyes, while Athene Seyler is excellent as a shrewd Queen Elizabeth, feisty but fair, her pixie-like face alight with calculation and concern. The Spanish papists may remain a shifty huddle of beards and ruffs but Donald Wolfitt breathes some humanity into his treacherous English nobleman. Cleverly crafted sets and striking costumes bring to life an impressive range of locales (ships, ports, gardens and courts) from London to Puerto Rico. There are quaint but charming special effects, a vibrant Elizabethan-flavoured score and editing (by E.B. Jarvis, of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*) that adroitly uses map and montage to convey epic voyages.

The film's crowning glory is its photography, credited to Claude Friese-Greene (of 1925's *The Open Road*), his assistant Ronald Neame (who took over here, aged 23, when Friese-Greene collapsed during filming) and Jack Parker (later a valued camera operator for Ealing). Every last shot is expertly composed, inventive back-projection provides added depth, and nimble camera movement captures dockside bustle or marauding raiders and endows soundstage ships with convincing ocean sway.

Disc: Picture and sound are mostly very good. Still, subtitles are missed. Beware skipping StudioCanal's lengthy ident, as this throws you several minutes into the film.

FOUR MEN AND A PRAYER

John Ford; USA 1938; Simply Media/Region 2
DVD; Certificate 12; 82 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

Watching John Ford's films of the 1930s can be both a fascinating and bewildering experience, since this was the decade when the director 'became' John Ford, experimenting with a variety of approaches and genres before returning to the western. Mixing drama, humour, militarism and romance, *Four Men and a Prayer* might stand as representative of this period, shooting off in several directions in the hope that something – a performance, an idea, a composition – will stick.

Although no Ford specialist has a good word to say about it, the film is of significant auteurist interest, being full of touches that anticipate the director's later work. The plot has four brothers –

Richard Greene, George Sanders, William Henry and David Niven – trying to clear their murdered father's name. As Ford told Peter Bogdanovich, "I just didn't like the story, or anything else about it... I kidded them slightly." This 'kidding' involves treating the entire narrative semi-satirically, something that sits uneasily alongside a massacre which, in style and tone, seems to have wandered in from another film. Where one feels *Four Men and a Prayer* quicken to life is the scene in which Barry Fitzgerald plays an Irish trooper who, enraged at being called an "English dog", participates in perhaps the first of Ford's good-humoured bar fights.

Although there is little hope of extracting a coherent theme from any of this, a repeated emphasis (as in *Fort Apache* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*) on the importance of appearances links the familial project with the final gesture made by a non-smoking revolutionary, who agrees to smoke a cigarette before being executed by firing squad because "people are watching". Rarely revived and seldom discussed, this minor Ford contains a number of charms when approached in an appropriately indulgent spirit.

Disc: A very decent transfer but no extras.

FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL

Terence Fisher; UK 1973; Warner Archives Collection/
Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 93 minutes; 1.85:1;
Features: commentary by Madeline Smith, David Prowse and genre historian Jonathan Sothcott

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Though not Hammer's final gothic horror film, Terence Fisher's last movie is a conclusion to the series he began in 1957 with *The Curse of Frankenstein*. If the lush, spirited, wittily gruesome earlier film is his *My Darling Clementine*, then this is *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, claustrophobically confined (95 per cent of it is set inside a drab 19th-century insane asylum) and revisionary about the genre's assumptions. Peter Cushing's Baron Frankenstein was always an amoral visionary but here he is also a fallen idol, viewed askance by a disciple (Shane Briant, getting equal billing) who models himself on the young Frankenstein but is disenchanted when he actually works with the man.

Cushing, at his gauntest and in a curly wig, remains as obsessive and energetic as always – he has one surprisingly undoubted action moment as he jumps off a table to wrap a coat around the Monster's head – but he succumbs to nostalgia if not *déjà vu*, remembering the first thrill ("long ago") of creating life as others might recall a first kiss. Previously, Frankenstein's experiments went awry thanks to inept associates or interfering fools; here, at the end of the line, we see that all his work is futile and doomed. The title emphasises the infernal wrongness of his ingeniously pointless researches, which involve cobbling together a hirsute creature (Dave Prowse) who is "no good to himself or anyone else". This baron is tone-deaf, can't understand higher mathematics, grossly insensitive in his eating habits ("Ah, kidneys!"), literally kicks a discarded brain out of a bowl, and howls with laughter over a throwaway eyeball



Globe theatre: *Drake of England*

BAD DAY AT BRADENVILLE

Despite its small-town setting and air of shiny Eisenhower-era prosperity, *Violent Saturday* is deeply steeped in *noir*

VIOLENT SATURDAY

Richard Fleischer; USA 1955; Eureka! Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 90 minutes; 2.55:1; Features: director Nicolas Saada on the making of the film, video appreciation by William Friedkin, booklet

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The movie is called *Violent Saturday* but it takes an awfully long time for anyone to pull a piece. Even if nobody ever did, there'd be every reason to keep watching, for the movie's interrelationships are so nimbly strung together, the performances so fit-to-scale.

Richard Fleischer's 1955 film is a study in festering small-town neurosis set in the city of Bradenville, geographically in the Red Rock American south-west but spiritually somewhere between Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Peyton Place*. The residents include Sylvia Sidney, the saucer-eyed brown mouse of Depression-era cinema, here as faded Elsie Braden, an impoverished descendant of the city's founders. Any day now Elsie may be foreclosed on by the bank manager, Harry Reeves (Tommy Noonan), whose favourite recreation is slipping into back alleys to peep on local nurse Linda Sherman (Virginia Leith). Linda, however, has developed a sympathetic understanding with Boyd Fairchild (Richard Egan), scion of the local copper dynasty, who's been driven to drink and ruin by his unfaithful wife (Margaret Hayes), leaving foreman Shelley Martin (Victor Mature) to pick up his slack at the mine.

Violent Saturday was shot on location in Bisbee, Arizona, a mining town whose main street runs along a declivity in the Mule Mountains. Bisbee is right next door to Douglas, the birthplace of critic Manny Farber – and to use Farber's designations, *Violent Saturday* is probably closer to White Elephant Art than Termite Art. It begins with a TNT blast that sends the title, rendered in a Neolithic chipped-stone font, thundering on to the screen. So too will the subterranean fantasies and frustrations of Bradenville's residents be jolted loose by the explosive events to come.

Three bad men (Stephen McNally, J. Carrol Naish and Lee Marvin) arrive in Bradenville one Friday to case the local bank for a stick-up the following day. The film covers about 24 hours in the town, during which time its residents will reveal their hidden lives and be tested in the crucible of action. (One of the film's funniest anecdotal digressions has an insomniac Marvin barging in on McNally on the night before the job to talk his partner's ear off about his "heebee-jeebies".)

In many ways *Violent Saturday* is a summation of Fleischer's career up to the point when it was made. He had begun making B-unit *noirs* for the



Pieces of the action: J. Carrol Naish, Stephen McNally and Lee Marvin rob the bank in *Violent Saturday*

likes of RKO and Eagle-Lion – resourceful, fleet movies such as *Trapped*, *Armored Car Robbery* and *The Narrow Margin*. And *Violent Saturday*, despite having a setting more appropriate to a classic western and a superficial air of shiny Eisenhower-era prosperity, is a film indebted to *noir* and its particular post-war complexes – Shelley's young son is ashamed of his father for spending WWII back on the home front. (In his booklet notes, the critic Adam Batty proposes a new designation for films such as *Violent Saturday* and fellow 1955 release *Bad Day at Black Rock*: the "film soleil".)

Fleischer eventually scrambled his way out of the Bs, and with Disney's megaproduction *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, shot in 1954 using the new CinemaScope process that was scarcely a year old, he proved himself an early adept at using the widescreen frame. *Violent Saturday* allowed him to combine his talent for crime subjects (and abrupt, stark violence) with further CinemaScope experimentation, building elaborate scenes that move gracefully between parties – in scenes set at a neon-lit cocktail bar in the Bradenville hotel, and in the local bank – thanks to deceptively simple side-scrolling gestures.

Violent Saturday belongs to *noir* yet doesn't. Its screenplay is the work of one Sydney Boehm,

Bradenville is spiritually somewhere between Sherwood Anderson's 'Winesburg, Ohio' and 'Peyton Place'

whose credits include Anthony Mann's *Side Street* (1949) and Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953), but the source material is a story originally published in the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*. There are certain shots – Boyd and his wife on the stairs of their manor, framed through the double-doors of the sitting room – that might belong to a melodrama from Sirk or Stahl. (Fleischer's other 1955 film was *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing*, a Joan Collins-starring period melo that has striking parallels to Ophüls's *Lola Montès*, released the same year.)

Fleischer's filmography renders at least a dozen titles that are the equal of *Violent Saturday* in interesting subject matter and formal audacity, though it's also too larded with work beneath his talents to place him on an equal footing with, say, Ophüls.

Nevertheless, Batty's notes mention "a turning of the tide" with regards to Fleischer's reputation, and this isn't an exaggeration. He was granted a retrospective as part of the 2013 Edinburgh International Film Festival. The most recent *Cinema Scope* magazine contains a feature titled "The Journeyman as Auteur: Richard Fleischer's *Fantastic Voyage*". And Eureka has wrangled together directors Nicolas Saada and William Friedkin – himself the beneficiary of the busy reappraisal industry – to pay tribute to Fleischer on its *Violent Saturday* disc. And whatever Fleischer's status may be in the final appraisal, it's certain that *Violent Saturday* represents the sum total of what he was capable of when on his game. 🍷

RAISING THE STAKES

Roger Vadim's vampire-themed art movie was the template for the stylish, self-aware horror pictures of the 60s and 70s

...ET MOURIR DE PLAISIR (AKA BLOOD AND ROSES)

Roger Vadim; France/Italy 1960; Big Ben Movies/
Region 2 DVD; 85 minutes; 2.35:1

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Roger Vadim's *...Et mourir de plaisir* (1960), an adaptation of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla*, was scheduled to play at the BFI Southbank during last year's 'Gothic' season but no projectable print could be sourced and so the screening was called off. It is a bizarre quirk that this commercially successful picture, known in its English-language form as *Blood and Roses*, has become one of the rarest horror films of the sound era. Backed by Paramount, it was perhaps the first vampire-themed art movie after Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), which was notionally based on the same material, and has proved influential on a whole range of subsequent films – including *Carmillas* from Camillo Mastrocinque (*Terror in the Crypt*, 1964), Roy Ward Baker (*The Vampire Lovers*, 1970) and Vicente Aranda (*The Blood Spattered Bride*, 1972) and also a run of stylish, erotic, self-aware European or European-influenced vampire movies made outside the horror mainstream by filmmakers such as Jean Rollin and Harry Kümel.

The film's only previous home-video release was a low-quality pan-and-scan NTSC VHS tape, the source of various illicit DVD dupes or online files floating around. This German DVD from Big Ben Movies (under the title *...und vor Lust zu Sterben*) at least presents the correct 2.35:1 Techniscope aspect ratio and offers more vibrant colours than the washed-out tape. The hues are inconsistent but it's possible now to get a sense of the gorgeousness of Claude Renoir's cinematography. Audio is offered in French and German, with optional subtitles in English. This is Vadim's continental cut of the film, which is slightly reshaped in its *Blood and Roses* incarnation (so hang on to that VHS) – going for a somewhat pompous ambiguity about whether its *Carmilla* (Annette Vadim) is genuinely possessed by a vampire ancestress or just driven mad by a fireworks accident and a long-simmering crush on her cousin Count Leopoldo De Karnstein (Mel Ferrer). Comparison between the German and American trailers included as extras shows how Paramount tried to sell *Blood and Roses* as a more conventional, less ashamed horror film – to the extent of replacing Jean Prodromides's delicate score with something more bombastic.

Though *Barbarella* (1968) sustains a lasting cult, Vadim's auteur reputation hasn't really survived – he's remembered more as a Svengali figure, credited with discovering (and marrying) Brigitte Bardot and Jane Fonda, than for his films. Between



Vadim vamps: Annette Vadim and Elsa Martinelli

these screen sirens, he had less success with the former Annette Stroyberg, a Bardot lookalike who is rather good here as the ambiguous, seething-yet-blank *Carmilla* – possessed by her ancestor to the point that she forgets how to work a gramophone but remembers 18th-century dance moves. Even the contemporary trailers try to stress the Bardot connection, which is underlined by the format of the title, *...Et mourir de plaisir* following *Et Dieu... créa la femme* (1956). Later versions of this story play up Le Fanu's hints of lesbianism, and Vadim does have the

There are a few straight horror-movie shocks but for the most part Vadim is interested in colourful, surreal imagery

vampire split her attention between Leopoldo and his fiancée Georgia (Elsa Martinelli), kissing a thorn-prick of blood off the latter's lips. However, changing the count from the heroine's father to her lover and rooting the vampire's monomania in heterosexual jealousy minimises this. This is one of the first horror films to use a post-*La dolce vita* moneyed contemporary European backdrop, opening with an anecdote told on a jet-plane and taking place otherwise on the vast estate of the Italian branch of the Karnstein family, which contains ancient ruins (sheltering a vampire's lost tomb) and landmines left over from WWII and is the site for a lavish masked ball that trades on the family's supernatural reputation ("Don't worry – we've stopped being vampires since 1775").

Vadim preserves the incestuous, decadent little knot of predatory-yet-pathetic aristocrats from Le Fanu but takes care to show them sometimes from the viewpoint of their livelier, fed-up servants: the bloodthirsty young sisters (Nathalie Lafaurie, Camilla Stroyberg) who devoutly pray for terrible fates for each other and are responsible for fostering the vampire legends, and who provide a streak of dark, ruthless humour.

The film is impressive mostly for its visual and aural imagination. There are a few more-or-less straight horror-movie shocks but for the most part Vadim is interested in colourful, surreal imagery – involving masks, reflections, ruins, fireworks, antique gowns, paintings, horses and Bava-like lighting effects. A dream sequence near the climax sets out to explore the fractured psyche of the dangerous yet doomed *Carmilla* but is so arresting in its strangeness that the Freudianism is overwhelmed. **S**



Bad blood: Annette Vadim as the 'possessed' cousin in *Et mourir de plaisir*

New releases



joke ("Let us hope it is he who shall see").

In this context, the baron's never-give-up attitude is his most frightening feature. Even as he's sweeping up the mess of the latest disaster (the guts of his creature are torn out and spread on the floor), he is raving about his next experiment, casting around for another tack ("more biochemistry"). In an insistent farewell shot, we see Frankenstein through the bars that once caged his monster. This segues into a model panorama which confirms that a man we have assumed unjustly committed is actually exactly where he ought to be, in a madhouse.

Disc: The Blu-ray transfer brings out the blood (Briant reports that "expired human blood" was used) and surgical guignol but also shows up sparse, cramped production values, which suggest the fag-end of a cycle even if they are also very apt for the film's tone.

Useful featurettes cover the production and Fisher, and a new commentary track offers Madeline Smith and Shane Briant moderated by Marcus Hearn (earlier issues had a more gossipy track with Smith and Prowse).

LUCIO FULCI COLLECTION

PERVERSION STORY/THE EROTICIST/THE PSYCHIC

Italy 1969/72/77; Severin Films/Region 1 DVD;

103/109/97 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: theatrical trailer, soundtrack CD ("Perversion Story"), featurettes

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Italian director Lucio Fulci is best known as the perpetrator of acts of screen violence that border on the surreal: sashaying tarantulas masticating a man's face in 1981's *The Beyond*, or a woman being pulped with a chain in 1972's *Don't Torture a Duckling*. In fact, Fulci was a jack of all trades, with nearly 60 movies to his name, and Severin Films' small box-set, bringing together three features not previously available on DVD, helps to give a broader perspective on the maestro's career.

The most memorable gore scene in the Lucio Fulci Collection – not to be confused with the decade-old Starz/Anchor Bay releases – occurs right at the beginning of 1977's *The Psychic*. A woman throws herself from the top of a cliff, and as she's on the way down, the outcropping rocks are seen to clip hunks of meat from her passing face. Rather crude stuff, but then Fulci is defined by a combination of the crass and the elegant. *The Psychic*, for example, also shows Fulci exercising his distinctive, calligraphically elaborate camera style – he is a master of editing-in-camera set-ups, which break single sustained sequence shots into complex component parts using a mixture of pans, dollies, zooms and ostentatious rack focuses. (And no one outside of Brian De Palma gets more use out of a split-focus diopter lens!)

The climax of this paranormal thriller, which has clairvoyant Jennifer O'Neill pursued by a suspected murderer, shows Fulci at the height of his powers. The timeline of the events being described is utterly garbled but his style is a triumph of screen poetics over reason.

Made on the cusp of his well-known run of horror-fantasy films, *The Psychic* was Fulci's return to the *giallo* thriller, a genre he had been working in since 1969's *Perversion Story*, also included here. Jean Sorel, an off-brand Alain



Nashville The finest of Robert Altman's multi-star, multi-plotted creations, it uses the music capital in all its glitzy, sentiment-clogged, back-stabbing glory

Delon, stars as a celebrity San Francisco physician caught in a frame-up involving a *Vertigo*-esque case of lookalikes, which ends with him sitting on death row. These scenes are filmed in the actual San Quentin gas chamber, one of a flabbergasting array of locations including New York, Paris and 'Frisco. The film's imagining of hep, liberated life in the City by the Bay is pretty square, but the score by Riz Ortolani – who died earlier this year – really swings and soars, and is included as a separate soundtrack CD.

Prior to *giallo*, Fulci's primary métier was comedy, and he returned to it in 1972's *The Eroticist*, a sex farce that takes potshots at practically every stratum of Italian society as it existed under the senescent rule of Christian Democracy.

On the eve of his election, uptight Senator Gianni Puppis (Lando Buzzanca, a popular comedian of the period), who has been raised to be a eunuch puppet of the clergy, is suddenly gripped by a fit of uncontrollable, grab-assing erotomania. The anti-clerical sentiment of *Don't Torture a Duckling* is again evident, as the Vatican – represented by Lionel Stander's corrupt cardinal – is fingered in a society-wide conspiracy that also implicates the Mafia, the carabinieri and an indifferent public, who would rather watch football matches.

On one of the included featurettes, Buzzanca remembers Fulci as being a man of enormous culture, as well as rather crass. Both the refinement and the animal spirits are evident throughout this set.

Discs: Some pixelated belching on *The Eroticist*, but otherwise A-treatment of B-material.

NASHVILLE

Robert Altman; USA 1975; Eureka!/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 160 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: commentary by Robert Altman, interviews with Robert Altman, Joan Tewkesbury and Michael Murphy, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"This isn't Dallas – it's Nashville!" yells C&W star Haven Hamilton (Henry Gibson), trying to rally the horrified crowd after his fellow star Barbara Jean (Ronee Blakley) has been fatally shot at an open-air concert.

But of course it *is* Dallas. And Memphis (Martin Luther King). And Los Angeles (Bobby Kennedy). And Washington DC, and Hollywood. The finest, most accomplished of Robert Altman's multi-star, multi-plotted creations (though *Short Cuts* runs it close), *Nashville* uses the music capital in all its glitzy, sentiment-clogged, back-stabbing glory as his sardonic metaphor for America, released the year before the bicentennial celebrations. Not surprisingly, *Nashville* hated it, as did a good many of the critics. But nearly 40 years on, Altman's film looks as relevant as ever, if not more so – a State of the Union message with none of the pieties or pomposity. Or, as Pauline Kael put it: "The funniest epic vision of America ever to reach the screen."

Nashville was the first film over which Altman had total control, with "nobody standing over me". After Joan Tewkesbury's script was turned down flat by United Artists, he went ahead off his own bat, shooting in his favourite freewheeling style and encouraging his multiple cast to improvise much of their dialogue and compose their own songs. Notable



Revival

FILMS BY ELIA KAZAN

BOOMERANG!

USA 1947; Eureka!/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 NTSC DVD Dual Format; 87 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1; Features: commentary, documentary ('Elia Kazan – An Outsider'), trailer, booklet

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN

USA 1945; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 110 minutes; 1.37:1

MAN ON A TIGHTROPE

USA 1953; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 90 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"I think the only good films I made were after the [HUAC] testimony," claimed a still-combative Elia Kazan in Annie Tresgot and Michel Ciment's candid 1982 portrait *Elia Kazan: An Outsider*. But since that dismisses his first two films with Marlon Brando as well as his entire 1940s output, it's tempting to take it with a substantial pinch of salt, especially given the fact that Kazan's first and third features clearly outpace his first post-HUAC one.

'Debut' implies a tremulous hesitancy, but when Kazan first called "Action!" on a Hollywood soundstage he had already spent more than a decade working his way up from assistant at New York's influential Group Theater in 1932 to noted Broadway director, equally adept with actors and elaborate mechanical effects. So it's little wonder that *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* has the muscular swagger of a far more experienced helmer, even if cinematographer Leon Shamroy deserves much credit for its fluid visual eloquence. (Shamroy proposed sharing a directing credit; Kazan nearly accepted.)

It was adapted from Betty Smith's 1943 bestseller, and its setting in Brooklyn's Irish-American community clearly appealed to Kazan's personal interest in the immigrant experience. But its major strengths lie in the subtlety with which the three central characters are fleshed out – the likeable yet hopelessly impecunious Johnny Nolan (James Dunn), his aloof, considerably more practical wife Katie (Dorothy McGuire) and their precocious but desperately conflicted teenage daughter (Peggy Ann Garner). Occasional soap operatics never undermine its intense watchability: the shoots of Kazan's more fêted 1950s studies of dysfunctional relationships are already well into the budding stage.

Based on a true story, *Boomerang!* initially seems to be pure *film noir*, although Kazan shot on location as much as was feasible, to emphasise the ordinariness of the small town in which a potentially innocent man is indicted for the cold-blooded murder of a local priest. But it's less a police procedural than an intricate study of how political machinations ruthlessly cut across what's ethically appropriate. It says much for Dana Andrews's sympathetic underplaying of the lawyer-turned-crusader protagonist that he's frequently challenged but never entirely upstaged by a supporting cast including Lee J. Cobb, Arthur Kennedy, Ed Begley and future Kazan regular Karl Malden – largely because Andrews himself gets to perform the most hair-prickling stunt during a piece of courtroom theatre towards the end.

Those two films predated Kazan's co-founding of the Actors Studio. By contrast,



On the hook: Dana Andrews and Arthur Kennedy in *Boomerang!*


The shoots of Kazan's more fêted 1950s studies of dysfunctional relationships are already well into the budding stage

Man on a Tightrope was the first film that Kazan made after the HUAC hearings, and boy does it show – although it offers a subtler critique of communism in practice than most other American films of its peculiarly paranoid era



From stage to screen: the young Kazan

(the film is set in Czechoslovakia in 1952, the Stalinist show-trial era). Kazan was clearly at pains not to caricature his own former political sympathies, even if the choice of a circus as a metaphor for individuals banding together against a monolithically unsympathetic political system seems a tad pat. (That said, it was inspired by the story of an actual East German circus defecting westwards.) The high points are the verbal chess matches between Fredric March's former owner of the circus (since taken over either by the state or the people, depending on which ideologue one believes) and assorted opponents, including Adolphe Menjou's wily official and Robert Beatty's rival impresario.

Unexpectedly, these discs demonstrate that a good DVD from a pin-sharp source can sometimes be more satisfying than an indifferent Blu-ray: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* looks terrific throughout, while *Boomerang!* is surprisingly muddy given Eureka's normally outstanding track record. *Man on a Tightrope* is generally very acceptable, though the interlaced transfer may react badly to some modern set-ups. But whereas the Simply Media discs (released separately) are completely barebones, Eureka offers a substantial extras package, including a scholarly commentary by James Ursini and Alain Silver (originally recorded for the US DVD) and the above-mentioned French documentary. The booklet combines new writing by Glenn Kenny with an archive interview with Kazan and the original 1945 magazine article that inspired the film. 

New releases

among that cast were Gibson, Blakley, Keith Carradine (who loathed the heartless womaniser he was called on to play) and Karen Black (as an ultra-glam diva). The film includes nearly an hour of music, and most of the songs were recorded with direct sound on first take – perfection was never the aim.

On top of the the 'soap opera' (his term) of his characters' interlocking stories, with their ambitions, scheming and bed-hopping, Altman overlays the political campaign of fictional presidential candidate Hal Phillip Walker of the Replacement Party, foreshadowing his TV miniseries *Tanner '88*. The humour is often mocking, sometimes cruel; when talentless wannabe singer Sueleen Gay (Gwen Welles) is pressured into stripping for a roomful of baying males, the scene is hard to watch. Yet Altman ends with a wry celebration of endurance.

Disc: A faultless high-definition restoration. But extras are sparse by comparison with the Criterion release.

PERFORMANCE

Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg; UK 1970; Warner Archive Collection/Region-free Blu-ray; 105 minutes; 16:9; Features: documentaries ('Influence and Controversy'; 'Memo from Turner')

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Comical little geezer – you'll look funny when you're 50," opines hard-nut gangster Chas (James Fox) of his putative landlord, reclusive rock star Turner (Mick Jagger). The 1968-shot film itself isn't far off its half-century, and whether it looks funny is down to personal opinion. However, it's clearer than ever that just as James Joyce sought to pin down turn-of-20th-century Dublin, brick by brick, in *Ulysses*, so Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg largely succeeded in encapsulating the spirit of an entire era in less than two hours.

Three writers to date have picked up on Jan Dawson's recommendation in her *Monthly Film Bulletin* review that "*Performance* is the kind of brilliant, baffling film about which it would be marginally more easy to write a book than a review." The most recent effort, by Paul Buck, is not only crammed with hundreds of interdisciplinary reference points but also convincingly argues that at least one of the filmmakers (usually Cammell, a cross-cultural gadabout if ever there was one) would have been fully aware of them, not least when casting the film largely with non-professionals (Anita Pallenberg, John Bindon, Johnny Shannon, Jagger himself) primarily according to what they represented. Has British cinema attempted anything this ambitious since? It's hard to think of a serious contender.

Disc: Although comfortably the best video version to date, this new Blu-ray is still a few whisker-lengths short of perfection. Visually, it offers the most detailed image yet seen outside 35mm, and the soundtrack reinstates Jagger's "Here's to old England", accidentally omitted from DVD editions. However, it also features the more US-friendly track, with Shannon and Bindon voicing their parts to make them sound less exotic to non-British ears. (Substituting "ketchup" for the original "claret" as a synonym for blood muffles one of the recurring observations about



Gangster rap: *Performance*

the social aspirations of the more ambitious London gangster.) This only affects a few minutes of the film's first third but keen-eared fans might prefer to wait and see if a still-hypothetical UK edition favours the unvarnished London version.

RIOT IN CELL BLOCK 11

Don Siegel; USA 1954; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 80 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary by film scholar Matthew H. Bernstein, excerpts from Siegel's autobiography 'A Siegel Film' and Stuart Kaminsky's 'Don Siegel: Director' read by Siegel's son Kristoffer Tabori, excerpt from 1953 NBC radio documentary series 'The Challenge of Our Prisons', essay by critic Chris Fujiwara, 1954 article by producer Walter Wanger, 1974 tribute to Siegel by Sam Peckinpah

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Enthusiasts of the prison-riot picture have reason to run wild! Warner Archives has rolled out genre prototype *The Big House* (1930), and now Don Siegel's *Riot in Cell Block 11* receives the Criterion treatment – a vindication for those of us who happen to believe that the director of *Hound-Dog Man* was one of the dozen or so greatest native-born American talents to ever work in the motion-picture business.

Siegel's value has nothing to do with self-important posturing and everything to do with the concision and lucidity of his style. Even at its most baroque, as in 1971's *The Beguiled*, Siegel's work is pared-down, essentialist – in his other great prison film, 1979's *Escape from Alcatraz*, he is closer to the Bresson of *A Man Escaped* than to what we think of as fuzz-guitar 70s action.

The subtractive nature of Siegel's art may be traced to the fact that he began his career as an editor, working in the montage department at Warner Bros. Peter Bogdanovich, quoted in the liner notes by Chris Fujiwara, would have it that *Riot* was Siegel's "first important movie", and while I'd put in a word for *The Verdict* (1946) and *The Big Steal* (1949), *Riot* is certainly the first Siegel movie that feels like a Siegel movie. This is evident right from the opening scenes: the cold, repetitive clacking of locks, the economical language of gestures, the starkness of the Folsom Prison location. (It's black-and-white but you imagine this world would look much the same in colour.)

Until the very ending, not one woman appears in *Riot in Cell Block 11*, and the men are a grim-looking lot. No one is physically attractive, and morally they're not much better. The prison warden is at least well meaning – the role is

played by Emile Meyer, a New Orleans stevedore discovered by Elia Kazan when he was location shooting for *Panic in the Streets*, here sweating through his shirtsleeves while rebellious inmates hold his prison hostage. The ringleader of the revolt, James Dunn, is played by Neville Brand, a decorated WWII veteran who'd more recently been on the skids, with a voice that sounds agonising to speak in. Dunn is ostensibly the film's hero, though his only qualification is that he's slightly less sadistic than 'Crazy' Mike Carnie, played by the hulking Leo Gordon, who'd been shot in the gut while holding up a bar before he turned to the picture business. The title says genre trash, but I say American neorealism, as true as it got in 1954, and probably ever.

Disc: A commentary track by Matthew H. Bernstein, biographer of independent producer Walter Wanger, ties *Riot* to Wanger's own four-month prison stint after he shot agent Jennings Lang in the groin – a gripping yarn in its own right.

IL SORPASSO

Dino Risi; Italy 1962; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 105 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: introduction by Alexander Payne; documentaries on Dino Risi, Vittorio Gassman and the Castiglioncello resort area, interviews with Risi and co-writer Ettore Scola, booklet essays, trailer

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

This iconic Italian road farce has proven to be something of a Rorschach movie: so simple in its narrative ingredients, and so anthropological in its expression of Italianness in the exuberant years of *il miracolo economico*, the film stirs up weighty associations and entrancements in many (in Italy it's a pop-cultural touchstone), while for others it can seem a trifle – and an abrasive one at that.

It certainly created the mismatched-buddies road-comedy footprint that a thousand spoofs have stepped into since: apropos of nothing, hedonistic blowhard Vittorio Gassman demands to use shy law student Jean-Louis Trintignant's phone, and then convinces him to hit the road on a lark. This soon turns into a multi-day voyage up the Tyrrhenian coast, during which, paradigmatically, both men's qualities rub off on each other and they both face their 'real' situations, in the form of family lives that aren't quite what the men had thought.

These ideas weren't clichés in 1962, and anyway Risi was too much of a *comediante* to dawdle on emotional fallout, favouring instead Gassman's relentless bad-boy brattiness (exemplified by his dismissal of Antonioni as soporific, and his sportster's grating toot-toot horn, blasted at every opportunity) and Trintignant's much funnier straight-man reaction shots.

Under the skin, the film is carrying a barely sublimated ambivalence about its characters, and about the Italian male personality; the title, as made clear in an essay by Jackson Burgess helpfully quoted by Phillip Lopate's keynote essay, refers to the dangerous macho Italian driving habit of 'passing' another driver come hell or high water, to demonstrate one's superiority on the road and in life. ("Stopping at a stop sign," Burgess wrote, "is prima facie evidence that the driver, if male, is a cuckold.") Famously, the psychotic driving behaviour in the

New releases

film ends tragically, in a post-James Dean manner that boldly suggests a zeitgeist moment. The tonal volte-face was copied by many films thereafter, from Richard Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (1971) to Fernando Di Leo's *To Be Twenty* (1978) to Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (1991) and beyond, but the jury's still out as to whether Risi's goofy, seemingly unfocused spree actually comments on its culture or is a semi-conscious reflection of it.

Disc: Characteristically, the welter of supplements accompanying this lavish set make the case for the film's enduring importance, in predictably florid terms, as they also contextualise Italian life in the mid-century and the 15-film, 30-year relationship between Risi and Gassman.

THE STRANGE WOMAN

Edgar G. Ulmer; USA 1946; Film Chest/
Region 0 NTSC DVD; 99 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Ostensibly in synopsis a cheapjack heartless-heroine women's melodrama in the *Gone with the Wind* mould, with Wellesian overtones, this mid-career Edgar Ulmer saga is one of the straightest films the beloved Skid Row itinerant ever made. Yet for all its grand gestures towards romantic and dramatic orthodoxy, it remains a secretive and almost disturbed film, a classically Ulmerian travail of delusional narrative, suggested psychopathy and creepy disconnection.

Jenner Hager (Hedy Lamarr) is the early-1800s shipping-town wild child scandalising the elders with sailor liaisons until her alcoholic father dies and she is adopted, and then married, by avuncular shopkeeper Gene Lockhart. From there, the fully adult Jenny schemes to subvert her husband with his son – smitten ne'er-do-well Louis Hayward (who is closer to lizardy, self-loathing dissolution here than ever). The machinations behind the hussy's eyes are never made totally clear; the young lovers share a Hitchcockian moment of dread when they realise that Lockhart's near-death experience is just that, but when it's followed eventually by the old man's demise (at the inadvertent hands of Hayward's coward), the new widow inexplicably shuts the son out, sending him off on a suicidal bender. George Sanders then manifests, in one of his very few honest straight-man roles, as a logging-camp manager next in line to fall under the woman's spell.

Throughout, Ulmer compresses his shadowy studio interiors like vices around his characters, and often goes for compositions – such as the bizarre image of Lamarr swaddled in an enormous bed, only her sideways face showing like a radiant toddler, surrounded by concerned 'adults' – that imbue the film with a disarming weirdness, suggesting there's something going on that we're not privy to. (Certainly, when Lamarr heads out into a studio storm to meet Sanders, and a nearby tree is hit by lightning, exploding into flames, the hint we get is not of dramatic emphasis but of a patently fake landscape going berserk.) In the middle of the story, the unpoliced Maine town in the background erupts into rioting and Gomorrah decadence for mysterious reasons; Jenny herself is so conflicted between using men and actually loving them that she seems genuinely bipolar.



A hit, a very palpable hit: *Theatre of Blood*

None of this may be intentional, but rather the familiar byproduct in Ulmer's oeuvre of the battle against constrained budgets and schedules forcing the man's peculiar instincts about behaviour, milieu and shortcut storytelling on to celluloid. Even so, it's a film that unfurls in Ulmeristan, not the world as we know it.

Disc: A nice HD restoration, without extras.

THEATRE OF BLOOD

Douglas Hickox; UK 1973; Arrow Films/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 100 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: audio commentary with the League of Gentlemen, interviews with Victoria Price, author David Del Valle, Madeleine Smith and composer Michael J. Lewis, original trailer, collector's booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Vincent Price's most sophisticated horror movie, *Theatre of Blood* was originally and more appositely named *Much Ado About Murder*, but 1963's Price-Karloff flop *The Comedy of Terrors* had proved that audiences prefer their titles irony-free. A blackly comic Shakespearean splatter-fest that builds on the multiple payback killings of the *Dr Phibes* series, it's long been a touchstone for Brit-horror fans, the merry, macabre highlight of the 1970s revenge-horror genre.

Appropriately, this release includes an affectionate cross-talking audio commentary from comedy troupe the League of Gentlemen, who deliver a group performance of insights and comic asides with authoritative über-fan ardour. Providing positive if giggly proof of the uses and gratifications model of audience theory, they're steeped in every scene, murmuring "We stole that bit" at regular intervals. They're particularly sharp on the mix of camp wit and surprising savagery in the Bard-to-the-bone vengeance that snubbed actor-manager Edward Lionheart (Price) metes out to the members of the Critics' Circle – the Ides of March stabbing from *Julius Caesar*, the *Troilus and Cressida*-themed impaling and those *Titus Andronicus* poodle pies. These strikingly grisly set pieces are tinged with real 70s ultra-violence, as Tutte Lemkow's murderous troupe of meths drinkers give a seedy whiff of *Clockwork Orange* menace.

Price rivets the eye, the film a teasing jape that tweaks his critical reputation as a horror ham but shows off the artistry in his elaborate portrayals. His Shakespeare speeches are also surprisingly good (Katharine Hepburn once wanted him to play Prospero), delivering a shot of unexpected

pathos. Full of playful intermediality, the film pinballs between spoofing and celebrating the vanished British tradition of the actor-manager, who squeezed low thrills out of high culture, rather as the movie does. It's a very British film all round, unabashedly layering schlock, shock and Shakespeare, right down to brassily subverting *The Merchant of Venice* by seizing its pound of flesh regardless, since "Only Lionheart would have the temerity to rewrite Shakespeare."

Disc: A cracking Blu-ray transfer, whose free-flowing blood is an authentically startling scarlet. However, the sound quality was slightly variable on the check disc, with levels sometimes changing from scene to scene. The plump package of extras is pleasing, but only the League of Gentlemen's geek chorus makes a real mark.

THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT

Michael Cimino; USA 1974; Second Sight Films/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 115 minutes; Certificate 18; 2.35:1

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

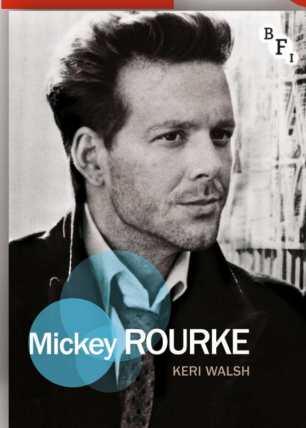
There's a lovely moment roughly a third of the way through Michael Cimino's melancholy-infused crime-caper debut: the boyish Lightfoot (Jeff Bridges) – callow, hound-dog accomplice to Clint Eastwood's grizzled older bank robber Thunderbolt – enthusiastically sets about wrapping his lips around a pistachio ice cream while sitting in the front seat of a car. Suddenly the barrel of a gun poking from the back seat tickles Lightfoot's neck: Lightfoot freezes, and the ice cream remains uneaten. There's a cut, and the next time we see Lightfoot, he's being held at gunpoint outside the car; the ice cream has melted down his arm. The sequence is beautifully edited, with attention paid to the micro-details of passing time, but it's also a perfect metaphor for the film's blend of soured sweetness, frustrated gratification and the collision of flighty fantasy and hard reality.

Initially marketed as a thriller, *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* unfolds at a remarkably leisurely pace. Cimino, working with cinematographer Frank Stanley, luxuriates in the vast, sprawling vistas of Montana, America's 'Big Sky Country', while every little nook and cranny seems to be investigating American mythos, predating the aching Americana of *Heaven's Gate* (1980). We first find Thunderbolt vamping it up undercover as an old-school preacher, while Lightfoot is quizzed on the origins of his name ("You Indian?"). The pair eventually end up at a one-room schoolhouse, founded in 1841 by Montana's oldest pioneer community. There are also hints of *The Deer Hunter* (1978) in the keen observation of strained homosocial relations.

Eastwood conveys mumbling charisma in an unflashy role, but the main attractions are elsewhere. Oscar-nominated Jeff Bridges is touching as the troubled drifter, and the great George Kennedy is superbly rancid as the perma-sweaty, hot-tempered and sexually frustrated Red (Thunderbolt's old army bud who wants in on the action). Consistently enjoyable and inebriably odd, *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* is an auspicious start to a filmmaking career of distinction.

Disc: A crisp transfer does the vast Montana landscapes justice. 🍷

Read



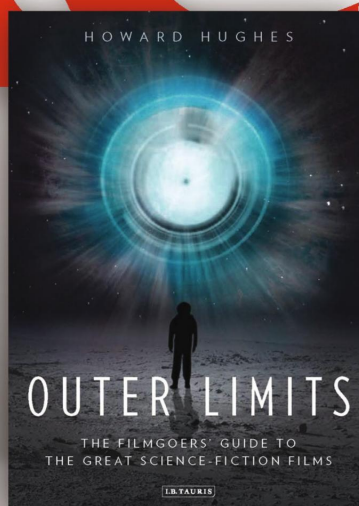
MICKEY ROURKE

By Keri Walsh, Film Stars series, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, paperback, 144pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781844574308

Mickey Rourke has been many things to many people over the course of his 35-year career: a bright young star fresh from the Actors Studio, a Hollywood heart-throb, a professional boxer, a muse to young independent filmmakers and a Comic-Con icon.

In this lively study, Keri Walsh analyses Rourke's performances in key films – from *Diner* (1982), *Rumble Fish* (1983) and *9½ Weeks* (1986) to *Sin City* (2005), *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Iron Man 2* (2010) – and traces the development of his star image. Taking an in-depth look at Rourke's career in its cultural and cinematic contexts, Walsh explores how this controversial and undersung star has intrigued audiences from the 1980s to the present day.

<http://goo.gl/C6Xd9X>



OUTER LIMITS

The Filmgoers' Guide to the Great Science-Fiction Films

By Howard Hughes, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 320pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781780761664
The milestone films of sci-fi cinema, from *Metropolis* to *Avatar*, are discussed in this Filmgoers' Guide, for anyone who enjoys a genre that has amazed filmgoers since the dawn of cinema. Illustrated with fine examples of sci-fi film poster art, *Outer Limits* goes deep into the most interesting and popular movies across sci-fi cinema's many forms, with core chapters used as launch pads to discuss lesser-known influential movies and sequels. Films featured include: *The War of the Worlds*, *Independence Day*, *Godzilla*, *The Time Machine*, *The Thing*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Barbarella*, *Galaxy Quest*, *Minority Report* and many more.

www.ibtauris.com



LE JOUR SE LÈVE

French Film Guide

By Ben McCann, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 136pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781780765921

Le Jour se lève (1939), directed by Marcel Carné, is widely recognised as the classic French poetic realist film. Told in flashback, it recounts the story of a man who has committed a murder, and who awaits his fate as the police close in. Carné shuttles between different registers, tones and textures throughout, marshalling the studio's resources to create striking pictorial compositions. The film also contains the great French star Jean Gabin's most iconic performance as François, marooned at the top of his apartment building. Ben McCann's perceptive and lively book traces the evolution of *Le Jour se lève* and situates it in a very specific historical moment.

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PENELOPE CRUZ

By Ann Davies, Film Stars series, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, paperback, 152pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781844574285

Part of a vanguard of Spanish talent claiming success at home and in Hollywood, Penélope Cruz is one of the best-known European stars today.

Focusing on Cruz's key films and their surrounding discourse, Ann Davies explores how the star is called upon to embody different ideas of youthfulness, nationality, exotic otherness, and the mature, established actress. Considering the contradictions of Cruz's star persona – between spontaneity and tightly controlled privacy, between hard work and passive beauty, and between Spain and Hollywood itself – this book charts the development of her career and the questions, difficulties and pleasures it inspires.

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WAYNE'S WORLD

JOHN WAYNE

The Life and Legend

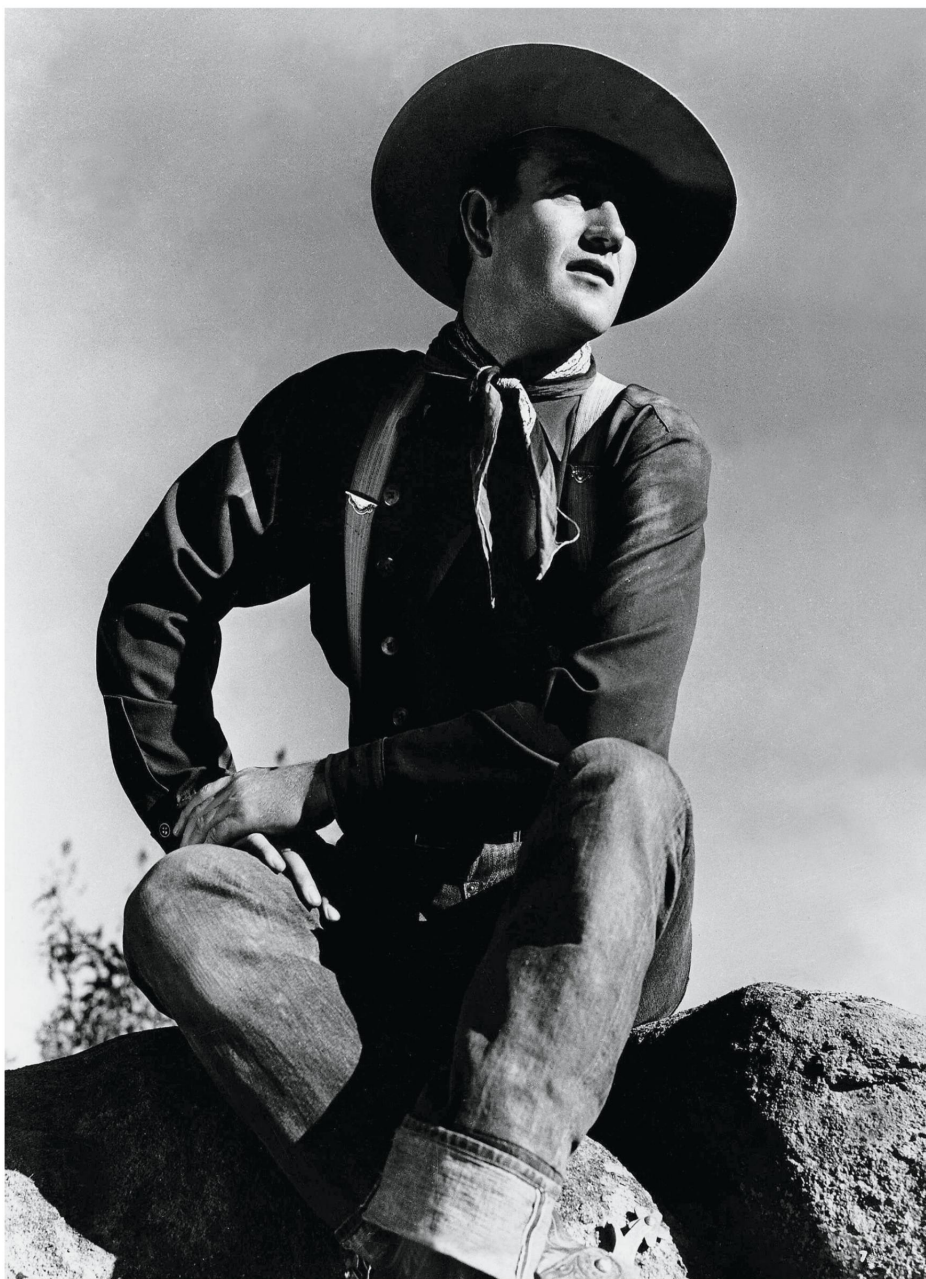
By Scott Eyman, Simon & Schuster, 658pp, £25, ISBN 9781439199589

Reviewed by Philip French

Scott Eyman, an established writer on the movies, is best known for *Print the Legend*, his life of John Ford. It complements this long, discursive, widely researched and generally admiring biography of John Wayne, which opens with an epigraph that seeks to explain his character and the shape of his life. In a *Movieland* interview of 1957 Wayne claimed that he wasn't and "never will be a screen personality like John Wayne". He's merely Duke Morrison, "one of his closest students" who's made "a living out of him".

So Eyman starts off with that crucial business of his subject's names and the identities they represent. He was born in the small, chilly community of Winterset, Iowa in 1907, son of Clyde Morrison, a feckless, heavy-drinking pharmacist and his wife Mary, a "borderline unpleasant" matriarch who thought herself superior to her irresolute husband, whom she dumped not long after they moved to California seven years later. They had christened him Marion Robert Morrison (not, Eyman tells us, Marion Mitchell or Marion Michael as other sources state), thus anticipating the Johnny Cash song 'A Boy Named Sue', in which a father gives his son an embarrassing name so he'll man up as a consequence of being teased at school, and it seems to have helped turn young Marion into a star footballer and boxer. Very soon he acquired the aristocratic nickname 'Duke', derived from his pet Airedale Terrier. The name 'John Wayne' was thrust upon him by director Raoul Walsh and Winfield Sheehan, head of production at Fox Studios. They'd snatched him from the ranks of prop men at Fox where he had a steady job, intending to make this shy, handsome, graceful 23-year-old the star of an epic widescreen western, *The Big Trail*, in 1930. The 'Wayne' was borrowed from a revolutionary general Sheehan admired. The film flopped, and as John Wayne he became a minor Hollywood figure, a Poverty Row star, his name above the title of dozens of B movies, mostly westerns. They guaranteed him a decent wage through the Depression. Then in 1939 he became rich, influential and iconic when his mentor, the irascible John Ford, who'd been quietly grooming him for a decade, transformed him into a major star with *Stagecoach*.

His name was never officially changed, but around the time of the birth of his brother Robert in 1911 he became known as Marion Michael Morrison. The nickname, however, persisted to the end, and an invitation to call him Duke



Not the Marion kind: John Wayne

was an indication that you had been accepted into the group of hard-drinking, poker-playing, misogynistic, right-wing cronies who hung out with him. Among the few who insisted on calling him John was the liberal Kirk Douglas, who in 1960 helped break the Hollywood blacklist that The Duke vociferously defended. John Wayne, however, became the subject of the legend, Morrison's public persona on the screen and in the limelight, the heroic figure in the shrine Morrison tended. What was always there though

was the self-deprecatory humour that could endear him even to his most bitter opponents.

To his credit Eyman prints both the discreditable facts and the aggrandising legend. He loves Morrison, the dedicated father and family man, and Duke, the gregarious, generous friend. But he reveres John Wayne, the embodiment of all that is best in the spirit of the West and of modern America. While being somewhat apologetic about the reactionary opinions and the shabby behaviour, Eyman

claims that 21st-century Middle America has now caught up with and validated Wayne's politics. But he doesn't flinch from a devastating comment by William Wyler, a moviemaker who risked his life in World War II and lost his hearing during military bombing missions on which he filmed combat documentaries. In a letter to *Newsweek*, Wyler spoke of Wayne, whose attempts to enlist during World War II were less than assiduous, as "a great American hero fighting for God and country in all services and in all wars. And it was all done for the cameras in Hollywood and on safe locations. That's damn good acting!"

But underlying the celebration of the man and his movies is a more damaging criticism of the way Morrison was affected by his extravagant lifestyle and his worshipful regard for his alter ego's popular reputation. After *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), his last significant collaboration with Ford, he churned out a series of undistinguished films, conservative in an unadventurous sense and based almost entirely on the prospect of financial gain. Eyman itemises every budget and provides a balance sheet for each movie. Wayne was offered the opportunity to work with, among others, Clint Eastwood on the abandoned *The Hostiles*; with Peter Bogdanovich and Larry McMurtry on what became *Lonesome Dove*; and with Tom Gries and Dick Richards. He turned them all down in favour of cautious second-rate directors and writers. The only exceptions to this sad roster are the wryly comic *True Grit* (1969) and the stoically tragic *The Shootist* (1976).

Eyman refers just once to Garry Wills, the distinguished leftwing Catholic intellectual and academic whose *John Wayne: The Politics of Celebrity* is not the last word on Wayne but is certainly the best so far. He quotes from a positive paragraph describing Wayne's particular "combination of physical strength and grace", in what he considers an "otherwise surly book". But Eyman's biography is in effect an overblown attempt at a riposte to Wills's damning analysis of Wayne's career and his influence on American national life and international politics. Wills is altogether the more trenchant, concise and convincing in his criticism, but his and Eyman's views generally coincide on what is the major

What was always present was a self-deprecatory humour that could endear Wayne even to his most bitter opponents

canon, and it is a considerable body of work, matched by few others. Of Eyman's 15 top Wayne films, five (*They Were Expendable*, *Hondo*, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Island in the Sky*, *Rio Bravo*) are not on Wills's list. Of Wills's 16, six are absent from Eyman's (*The Big Trail*, *The Shepherd of the Hills*, *Big Jake*, *Rooster Cogburn*, *The Long Voyage Home*, 3 *Godfathers*). The ten they agree on are *Stagecoach*, *The Searchers*, *Red River*, *Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *Rio Grande*, *The Quiet Man*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *True Grit* and *The Shootist*. Eyman's seems to me the better choice. 5

GARDEN OF DREAMS

The Life of Simone Signoret

By Patricia A. DeMaio, University Press of Mississippi, 346pp. £36.95, ISBN 9781604735697

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

This biography of French actress Simone Signoret is openly written from an American perspective, part of its publisher's 'Hollywood Legends' series. This positioning is peculiar, given that Signoret's Hollywood career was notably mediocre and that her greatest English-speaking achievement, *Room at the Top* (1958), was British. Nevertheless, an outsider's view on a national icon can be productive and Patricia DeMaio rightly signals the conspiracy of silence that has built up in France around Signoret's relationship with her husband, the singer and actor Yves Montand, and the troubled legacy of one of the country's most famous star couples.

Signoret is indeed a fabulous topic for a biography. Born in 1921 to a Jewish émigré father from Poland and a French mother, she struggled to support her mother and brothers after her father left to join De Gaulle's Free French forces in England during the German occupation. This period also saw her acquaintance with the intellectual milieu of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the cinema. A stunning beauty, she became a star in the *noir* melodramas of her first husband, Yves Allégret – for example, *Manège* in 1949 – but her life changed when she fell head over heels for Yves Montand the same year. They married and although she almost gave up the cinema then, she went on to star in such landmarks as *Casque d'or* (1952), *Les Diaboliques* (1955) and *Room at the Top*, for which she won an Oscar. Until her death in 1985 Signoret and Montand remained a high-profile couple, known for their shifting political positions, for communism and then against it. Their relationship was also marked by Montand's notorious affair with Marilyn Monroe during the shooting of *Let's Make Love* (1960) in Hollywood. Signoret thereafter aged visibly fast, a process helped by alcohol, but, astonishingly, she reinvented herself, not once but twice: first as a respected actress in often unglamorous mature roles, as in *L'Armée des ombres* (1969) and *Madame Rosa* (*La Vie devant soi*, 1977), and then as a successful writer of biography and fiction.

Garden of Dreams is a well-researched, sensitive and highly readable biography that gives Signoret her due. DeMaio documents the complications of her life without getting lost in detail. Particularly illuminating are the sections devoted to the war years, revealing Signoret caught in the contradictions of the era. When her father left the family without means, Signoret turned to the only contact she knew for a job, publisher Jean Luchaire, father of her schoolfriend and fellow actress Corinne. The fact that the Luchaires were collaborationists sat awkwardly with her leftwing circle and her lack of involvement in the Resistance would later haunt her. DeMaio also adeptly takes the reader



Conspiracy of silence: Simone Signoret

There is a contradiction between this woman's intelligence and huge talent and her, at times, abject devotion to Yves Montand

through the Monroe affair and the startling lengths to which gossip columnist Hedda Hopper went in her unsuccessful attempt to prevent Signoret, as a 'leftie', from getting her Oscar.

Garden of Dreams, inevitably, has to tackle the greatest conundrum of Signoret's life – the contradiction between this woman's intelligence, sophistication and huge talent and her, at times, abject devotion to Montand. Describing herself as 'groupie' or 'Mediterranean wife', she put her career on hold for him and forgave the public humiliations he inflicted on her (not just with Monroe). DeMaio suggests darker reasons for her behaviour – based on claims in books by Signoret's grandson Benjamin Castaldi and her daughter Catherine Allégret that the actress had turned a blind eye to Montand's abuse of Catherine – but one would like her to rise above the evidence and relate Signoret's predicament, for instance, to gender politics in France. To write that "Simone was not a victim of the past or of a generational divide; she was a victim of her own desires" is a bit short on analysis.

There are a few quibbles, including unoriginal accounts of films and the paucity of photographs. The author's unfamiliarity with French (she acknowledges translators and interpreters) is visible in minor but annoyingly recurrent errors in French words, such as the systematic misspelling of La Colombe d'Or, the hotel in Provence where Signoret and Montand met and often visited, or film titles such as the unwittingly charming '*Jean de Flore*'. This could be down to proofreading. The claim that this is the first biography of Signoret in English is questionable, since there already exist a translation of Catherine David's French biography (1992), and Susan Hayward's study *Simone Signoret: The Star as Cultural Sign* (2004). Nevertheless, DeMaio's book offers an up-to-date, comprehensive and entertaining biography of one of French cinema's most fascinating film stars. It will please those new to Signoret as well as her existing fans. 5

POLA NEGRI

Hollywood's First Femme Fatale

By Mariusz Kotowski. University Press of Kentucky, 320pp, \$40, ISBN 9780813144887

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

When Pola Negri arrived in New York on 12 September 1922 aboard the ultra-luxurious R.M.S. Majestic, she was greeted by a ravenous press pack and a phalanx of cheering fans, including a band playing the Polish national anthem. A waiting limousine took her directly to Paramount founding fathers Zukor and Lasky themselves, and an ambitious schedule of high-end dinners, galas and photoshoots. She was the first European film star to be exported to Hollywood, and a figure of glamour, curiosity and outright exoticism. The magazines called her a "tiger woman".

Nearly two decades later, in 1941, Negri made the same trip from Europe to America on the overcrowded S.S. Excalibur, fleeing the war. This time the actress was stopped on arrival, not by journalists and dignitaries, but by the dubious officials of Ellis Island. When she reached Manhattan, a group of her devotees had gathered to welcome her, but instead of flowers, they had been considerate enough to bring her a food parcel. Negri was still a star, but she had fallen.

Negri's life story is undeniably a dramatic one. It's a grand sweep from ballet school in Warsaw to silent-era stardom in Berlin, Hollywood and back to Berlin, followed by years of semi-obscurity in Texas. The supporting cast is illustrious too: thanks to Negri's aristocratic marriages, her romances with Chaplin and Valentino, her acclaimed but tumultuous collaborations with Ernst Lubitsch, and the allegations of her closeness to Hitler in the 30s. But while Negri was certainly renowned in the 1920s, a glittering diva to rival her Paramount stablemate Gloria Swanson, these days her name is celebrated mostly in her native Poland.

Perhaps it was that return to Germany, and German cinema, in the 30s that damaged her stock. Perhaps American audiences never truly warmed to "the black lotus flower of Europe" in the first place. Negri always believed that women, and stars in particular, had the right to remain mysterious and aloof – a publicity strategy that rarely plays in Peoria. There's no doubt at all that Negri's histrionic, and very public, mourning of Valentino raised distrust and hostility in both moviegoers and her Hollywood peers.

And yet Negri remains an important figure in the history of film – particularly silent film – not least because she was so wonderful an actor. In the films she made with Lubitsch in Berlin, and many of her later works too, she is an electric talent: uninhibited, physical, sexy and with a wickedly expressive face. She's unforgettable as a feral bandit in Lubitsch's *Die Bergkatze* (1921); playing a desperate prostitute in *The Way of Lost Souls* (AKA *The Woman He Scorned*, 1929), or steeped in sensuality and defiance as she sings 'Paradise' in *A Woman Commands* (1932). The unruliness that enlivens her best roles sets her apart, even while it betrays how maddeningly difficult she must have been to work with. She was terribly good at what she did, and she took herself incredibly seriously – but that high-handedness cost her some friends, including that fruitful relationship with Lubitsch. And for good or ill,



The star who fell to earth: Pola Negri

Negri's experiences helped to set the pattern for the European stars who entered Hollywood after her too: exotic, erotic but not quite to be trusted.

So this biography of Negri is long overdue and Mariusz Kotowski, a Polish writer and filmmaker, clearly has a passion for his work. The book follows the documentary film he made in 2006, *Pola Negri: Life Is a Dream in Cinema* – and in many ways, it feels more like a biopic than a biography. Kotowski is excellent at describing the performance traits that made Negri so special, and underlining how Hollywood, and the pesky requirements of the Hays Code, hemmed her in. I would argue that Negri often triumphs over the morality of her material – in the whipping scene that so oddly concludes *A Woman of the World* (1925), say, or shredding her dress at the climax of *Hotel Imperial* (1927). But Kotowski's devotion to his subject and understanding of her work may well convert a few doubters, which is to be lustily applauded in itself.

For the most part, this is a romp through the Negri story as Negri herself would tell it. And

In the films she made with Lubitsch, she is an electric talent: uninhibited, physical, sexy and with a wickedly expressive face

while it's definitely entertaining, it's not terribly illuminating, and often frustratingly lacking in detail. There is a very useful chronology of Negri's life at the back of the book – invaluable because dates are so rarely mentioned in the main text. A few clumsy sentences may be artefacts of the book's translation from Polish into English, but the tone is largely conversational, as many of the lengthier quotes in the book are taken from interviews conducted for the documentary.

A few famous embarrassments are discreetly passed over here and Kotowski often takes the party line from Negri's 1970 autobiography, *Memoirs of a Star*, without a quibble, on subjects from her drinking habits to her love affairs to her negotiations with Nazi officials. Silly quotes from fan magazines are reprinted as an insight into Negri's true feelings towards her leading men, or to the differences between European and American cinema. Even when Kotowski quotes her ghostwriter questioning her fanciful account of her first night with Valentino, the challenge goes bizarrely unacknowledged.

As a labour of love, and a heartfelt case for the strengths of its leading lady, this book will no doubt contribute to the rehabilitation of Negri. We can be sure that her name has finally been redeemed, though, when a biographer feels confident enough to scrutinise her fancies and her failings as well. **S**

LADY IN THE DARK

Iris Barry and the Art of Film

By Robert Sitton, Columbia University Press, 496pp, £27.50, ISBN 9780231165785

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The men and women who fought for film's recognition as an artform, and embodied it in the international institutions of film culture, often had stories every bit as interesting as the filmmakers whose work they canonised, preserved and circulated. Yet with the possible exception of Henri Langlois, co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française, their names are scarcely known to non-specialists. Iris Barry, as Robert Sitton argues, was the "most consequential" among them. Born in Birmingham in 1895, she was brought to London by a combination of war work – she once wrote an article titled 'We enjoyed the war' – and poetry. She joined the modernist avant garde as a protégée of Ezra Pound and had a relationship with Wyndham Lewis – "the only person who never bored her" – who fathered at least one of her two children.

She made her name as film critic of the *Spectator*. Its editor John St Loe Strachey wanted to help encourage the ailing British industry; she attended instead to German expressionism and Hollywood comedy, describing the native product in her first column as "decidedly quiet and sometimes dull". In 1925 she helped found the original Film Society, which showed uncommercial and otherwise censored films to the cultural and social elite, which led in turn to a position as film correspondent for the *Daily Mail* ("the money seemed divine"). In 1930, having been sacked by the *Mail* for attacking one British film too many, she left for New York, freelancing and ghostwriting before finding her feet at the newly established Museum of Modern Art.

There she helped devise plans for a Film Library and became its curator on its foundation in 1935. As she wrote in *Sight & Sound* at the time: "The bulk of films, both domestic and foreign, which are of importance historically or aesthetically, have been invisible under existing circumstances, and in serious danger of being permanently lost or destroyed by the action of time." The MoMA Film Library, backed by the Rockefeller and Whitney fortunes, therefore set out to "trace, catalog, assemble, preserve, exhibit and circulate" films to museums and colleges. Barry and her second husband John Abbott, a former Wall Street broker, spent the pre-war years touring Europe, stocking the vaults with the films Barry had once championed as a critic. MoMA's basement film screenings, which began in 1939, were an instant success.

Sitton's approach to biography is perhaps explained by his citation of a letter Barry received from her first husband Alan Porter about her biography of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. "If dead men have lost their tongues," wrote Porter, "not all the art of the biographer will do better by them than a modest raising of their spirits. The biographer's art is the jeweller's, to build a setting for the words that remain." For much of its length *Lady in the Dark* is practically an anthology of Barry's criticism, letters and unpublished memoirs, with not insubstantial block-quotes from elsewhere. Given how far Barry's tongue has been lost since her death in 1969, there

is something to be said for this approach. Barry's writing may be of mostly "historical interest", but that interest is considerable.

Still, Porter was wrong: a biography is not a mere substitute for an autobiography; and Barry did not tell all in hers. As a consequence, her relationships are only half-scrutable. Some things we shall never know, but in one important instance Sitton might have employed more of the biographer's art. Both of Barry's children thought that the father of her firstborn, Robin, was in fact Sidney Bernstein, which would explain a lot if true. Both Bernstein and Lewis would remain in Barry's life for decades, the one supporting her and her (or their) offspring, the other by turns inflicting emotional pain and asking favours. By dismissing the children's theory on the basis that Barry and Bernstein did not meet until 1925 – which is certainly untrue – Sitton gives in too easily.

Moreover, Sitton's settings are far from perfect: for example, John St Loe Strachey was not the father of Lytton, and Barry, while living in

She lauded Hollywood comedy and German expressionism, describing British films in 1924 as 'quiet and sometimes dull'

Bloomsbury, had little if anything to do with the Bloomsbury set; and as a former pupil of the King Edward VI School she cannot be described as a "self-educated farm girl". He is more convincing on the American part of her career, in particular the internal machinations of MoMA, where her employees included Luis Buñuel and Siegfried Kracauer. By the mid-1940s, by which time she and Abbott had divorced, Barry wanted to get "back on the fringe of the intellectual world instead of the periphery of business"; her reasons for failing to do so remain slightly mysterious. After a cancer operation in 1949 she essentially retired, living in near poverty, rather beyond the fringe, in the hills above Cannes.

The focus on MoMA comes at the expense of Barry's other achievements, especially FIAF, the International Federation of Film Archives, which she helped found in 1938, before becoming president for life in 1946. Indeed, more might have been made of her significance outside English-speaking countries: Barry was interviewed by the young Langlois during her European tour in 1936, just as he was trying to establish the Cinémathèque, and according to his biographers he made decisive use of her rescue of scores of Méliès films "to get at the nation's pride" and thereby aid his own cause. For all its flaws, however, this is a very welcome and long overdue tribute to a fascinating figure. **S**



The collector: Iris Barry spent the pre-war years tracking down the films she had championed as a critic

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READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

'BLUE' MAN GAWP

I had hoped somebody else would address Frank Noack's letter (Letters, S&S, February) on male gaze and Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, but it seems that even spaghetti was more important (Letters, S&S, April), so I have to do it, with all the fears of sounding too boring and didactic.

In his letter, Noack dismisses Sophie Mayer's review of the film as reliant on Laura Mulvey's seminal concept of the 'male gaze', claiming that the concept is antiquated since 'male' is no longer a homogeneous notion. This is, however, missing the point. What Mulvey explains in her influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is that the civilisation we live in has been patriarchal for so long that it has created a culture with an ideological framework to suit its needs; we are all conditioned by this culture, through the acquisition of language and knowledge. So whether we are born biologically female, male or other; whether we subsequently define our gender as feminine, masculine or other; and whether we define our sexuality as gay, straight, bisexual, asexual or other; we have all already adopted the male gaze. Certain of these identities would presumably have brought one into a position confronting social and cultural expectations of one's place within the established order. However, this in itself would not make the concept obsolete – quite the opposite. The question remains how to (consciously) distance oneself from the male gaze, rather than to just somehow 'skip' it.

As John Berger has pointed out, in art 'men act, women appear'. Given the context of this film, Mayer was absolutely correct to introduce the notion of male gaze. Where Noack was perhaps right is in saying that Kechiche may deserve more credit for his strategies in juggling the very sensitive issues treated in this extraordinary film. That is open to interpretation – whereas the appropriateness of Mulvey's concept is not. **Vlastimir Sudar** *London*

SPOILED ROTTEN

In her review of *The Two Faces of January* (S&S, June), I relished Sophie Mayer's description of "Brylcreemed, Zippo-flicking machismo", but then she wiped the smile off my face by casually detailing the fate of one of the characters. There was no spoiler warning on the piece, but even if there had been, perhaps it'd be a good idea to insist that your reviewers do not include spoilers, full stop? Given Mayer's careful use of language elsewhere, I wonder if she could have used a more ambiguous phrase, such as "fate", rather than "violent death"? It would not have detracted from her piece and would help to keep some surprise for the audience.

I purposely never read the synopsis of a film I intend to see – but would like to be able to read the reviews without wondering if I'll stumble on an unnecessary giveaway.

Roland Moore *by email*

LETTER OF THE MONTH A WORD TO THE WISE



Nick James states in his editorial (S&S, June) that "cinema and TV have the advantage over the written word of being able to represent non-verbal body language," something that contributors to last month's letters page may want to remember when viewing Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*. The supposed "barebones stuff" is a powerful, poignant film that strips away dialogue to reveal its themes through the subtleties of body language and the poetry of the visual image. Small moments reveal so much – the hand pinch of the unsuspecting hitchhiker who questions whether he is inside a dream, or the silent gasp

of a submerged man realising his fate. The barren expanse of the Scottish landscape and the hauntingly beautiful soundtrack (which at once creates tension and entices you in with its siren's song) echo the themes of isolation, entrapment in your body and the desire to escape. This isn't a film about "pupation into womanhood" but one that reflects the desperate escape from the expectations society places on us through image and status. The climactic ending asks: do you ever escape from what you are expected to be, and what price do you have to pay to do so?

Wendy Boote *Stoke-on-Trent*

PARENTAL ADVISORY

I was surprised that in neither the review nor the synopsis of *Before the Winter Chill* (S&S, June) was it mentioned that Victor, ostensibly the son of Paul and Lucie, was in fact their friend Gérard's son. So he and Lucie had been more than good friends at one time. If nothing else, that gives Lucie a more interesting backstory than your reviewer allowed.

Prue Chennells *by email*

CHIMERICAN HUSTLE

Thrilled to see *A Touch of Sin* take up major page real estate ("The Old and the New", S&S, June). And while your review aptly juxtaposes the film's employment of physical violence with that of Quentin Tarantino's hollow blood porn, I found Jia's film offered a much bolder thematic collision with – and interrogation of – the West in terms of economic influence. From the moment we see a lone biker adorned with a Chicago Bulls beanie hat, to the passing of a truck hosting a monstrous painting of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jesus of a Wasp worldview (which gives way to a lingering shot of a statue of Chairman Mao), there's hardly a beat in the film that doesn't remind you that this grim cauldron of corruption, confused class identity and reckless selfishness comes as the result of a very American flavour of capitalism swirling in the dark clouds above Jia's China. If contemporary studio Hollywood

can be reciprocally influenced by Jia's film, as his vision of China is so damningly by the West, *A Touch of Sin* might provide in a meta context what the film's characters never realise in their social trappings: a solution to all the might-is-right madness presently engulfing a culture.

David Valjalo *Liverpool*

SECOND SKIN

In response to Pete Moore (Letters, S&S, June) I too read the Michel Faber novel *Under the Skin* after watching Jonathan Glazer's film. But rather than see it as a poor relation, I feel the film is best viewed as a sequel to the book, with Laura (Scarlett Johansson) as Isserley's more advanced replacement, bringing with her new capture/processing techniques. Seen as sequel, the ending of the film is even more heartbreaking.

Ian Low *Carnoustie*

Additions and corrections

June p.66 *Advanced Style*, Cert PG, 72m 15; p.67 *American Interior*, Cert 12A, 92m 8s; p.78 *Next Goal Wins*, Cert 15, 97m 48s; p.79 *Noah*, USA 2014, ©2014. Paramount Pictures Corporation and Regency Entertainment, (USA), Inc. (in the United States), ©2014. Paramount Pictures Corporation and Monarchy Enterprises S.a.r.l. (in all other territories) Produced by Scott Franklin, Darren Aronofsky, Mary Parent, Arnon Milchan. Visual Effects & Animation by: Industrial Light & Magic. Visual Effects by: Look Effects, Inc., Technicolor, Mr. X Gotham. Ray Winstone plays Tubal-cain; p. 84 *Pulp: A Film about Life, Death and Supermarkets*, Cert 12A, 89m 30s
May p.78 *The Love Punch*, United Kingdom/France/USA; p.83 *Omar*, Cert 15, 98m 25s

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY



The extended shot of Bob Hoskins's London gangster being driven away by IRA killers caps one of the late, great actor's finest performances

By Trevor Johnston

Ninety-nine out of 100 filmmakers would probably have done it as a freeze-frame. That denouement where the anti-hero, battered but unbowed, believes he's about to emerge with dignity intact – until the trap suddenly closes around him with airtight inevitability. Freezing on that instant would have epitomised the recalcitrant or resigned reaction of Bob Hoskins's now-doomed London gangster Harold Shand, yet director John Mackenzie chose another option entirely. Instead, he keeps the camera tight on Hoskins and lets the thoughts play across his face for a full, kaleidoscopic minute-and-a-half as our man is driven away by ruthless IRA assassins to a dark place from which he will never return.

The telling inference here is that a single moment is simply not enough to do this man – and indeed this actor – justice. It says that Harold Shand is capable of gritty defiance, naked fear, rueful self-mockery, even darkening acceptance – and that all these add up to a defining moment of self-realisation. As such, the very length of the shot proves what has been evident throughout Barrie Keeffe's biting screenplay and Hoskins's career-defining performance – that Harold is no two-dimensional crime-flick caricature, but a rounded, complex individual whose flawed humanity also speaks volumes about the society that spawned him.

Given Hoskins's magnetic screen presence, you'd almost assume this bullish, diminutive

dynamo was an accomplished film actor by then. As the recent obituaries for his sad passing at the age of 71 were right to point out, however, his trajectory thus far had largely covered stage and television, where he conveyed an inner core of irrepressibility as the 1930s sheet-music salesman venturing through Dennis Potter's BBC series *Pennies from Heaven*. His work in 1979's *The Long Good Friday* and in *Mona Lisa* for Neil Jordan seven years later arguably remain the quintessence of Hoskins's achievement, signifying that this no-neck scrapper, whom central casting might have consigned to third henchman on the right, was not only capable of an extraordinary expressive range, but had the true cinema actor's instinctive feel for just how much emotion he had to show, and just how much he knew the camera would draw out of him.

The final scene, of course, is a triumphant demonstration of that fine-tuned judgement, captured as Mackenzie drove through central London, issuing directions to Hoskins in the back seat, and concentrating so hard on his leading man in the rearview mirror that he nearly ran into a bus. This is the culmination of a film whose daring core narrative, in which a ruthless street-tough gang leader's attempt to further his legit activities in an ambitious property development prompts an unexpected tussle with Republican terrorists, is rendered even more intriguing by the truly prescient specifics of Harold's plan to build big on the disused quays of London's Docklands. Guiding it all, moreover, is Mackenzie's

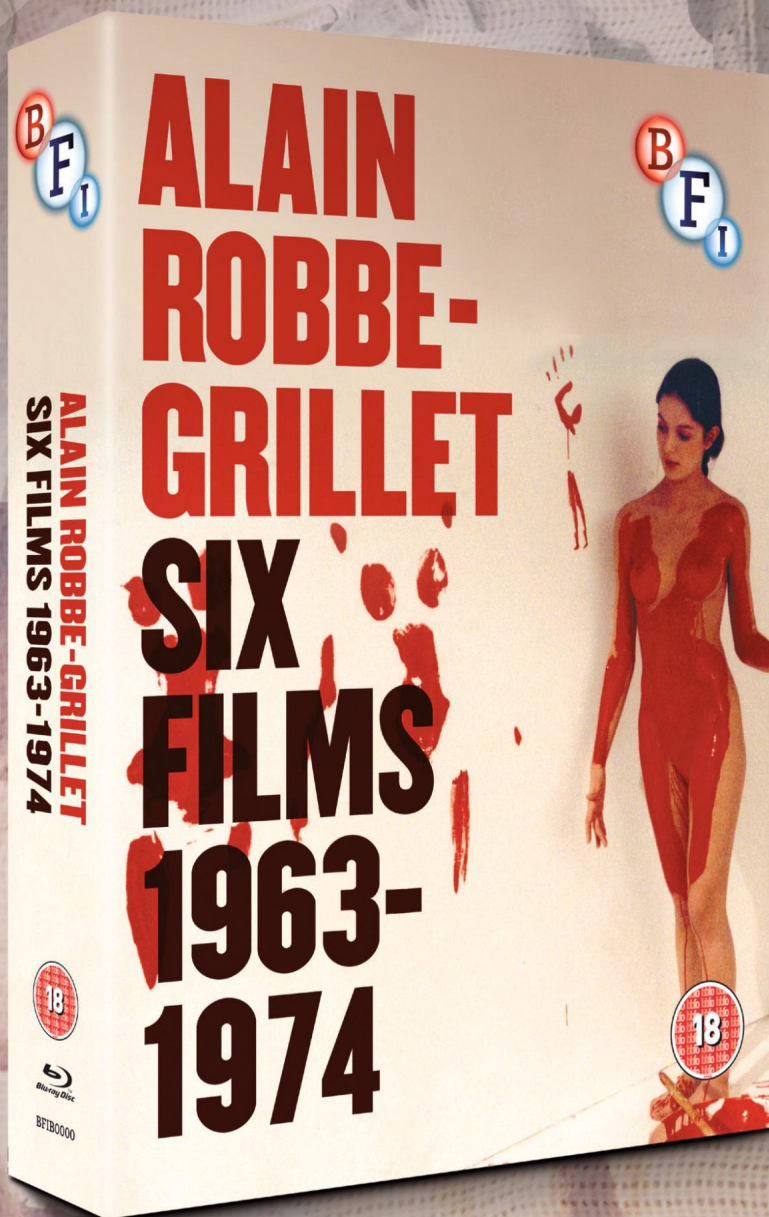
Harold is no two-dimensional crime-flick caricature, but a rounded, complex individual with a flawed humanity

intelligence in knowing that only by humanising and deepening Hoskins's characterisation of Shand would the film earn the right to be taken at all seriously as a portrait of its time and place.

That's the lasting effect of the closing moments, but these are presaged in a series of key earlier encounters, in which Harold loses his rag with his lover (Helen Mirren, astute equal rather than decorative moll) and is then overcome with self-recrimination after accidentally gashing a previously trusted cohort's throat with a broken bottle – each instance contrasting brutish, instantaneous volatility with a surprising degree of sensitivity and self-awareness.

That said, it might just be the penultimate scene that steals the show entirely. Failing to prevent his wealthy American would-be backers from flying home in the wake of so much carnage, Harold launches into a ferocious speech berating their spineless lack of entrepreneurial spirit. "What I'm looking for is someone who can contribute to what England has given the world," he snarls at them. "Culture, sophistication, genius. A little bit more than an 'ot dog, know what I mean?"

So, greed, enterprise and patriotism combine in one of the speeches that in retrospect identify Hoskins's upwardly mobile crook as an absolute exemplar of Thatcherite values. Since the film throughout insists on presenting us with the heterogeneous totality of its central character, we're also warned that such impulses should be taken in tandem with Harold's darker side, his ingrained racism and murderous lack of scruple in the face of a good deal. Indeed, when Harold scours the working-class areas of London to kidnap local gangland movers and shakers and sling them up on meat hooks in an abattoir, it's clear even at this early juncture in the Thatcher years that there really is no such thing as society. 📌



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